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Introducing Modern Poetry

INTRODUCING MODERN POETRY

An Anthology by
W. G. BEBBINGTON

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PREFACE

THIS collection of modern poems is the result of my disagreement with those who assert that all modern poetry is occult and incomprehensible: all the poems in it are modern in the strictest literary sense of the word, but not one of them is—at least as far as I can see—either occult or incomprehensible. Many modern poems, I agree, are; many are, to say the least, esoteric in sense and ugly in form; and many, I would say, are bad on all accounts.

But the writing and publication of bad poetry is not a modern privilege. There has not yet been a poet who has not written and not had published worthless verse, nor on the other hand has there been one who has become famous and admired because all his verse is worthless; and there has not yet been a time when the published poetry was either all good or all bad. Most ages present us with a tolerable balance of good and bad art, though certain periods, it is true, have produced a surfeit of one or the other: the Elizabethan, for instance, produced more good literature by far than bad, and, vice versa, the earlier Georgian more bad than good.

Just because, therefore, there is difficult poetry about to-day, it does not necessarily follow, as some so-called literary critics would have us believe, that all modern poetry is difficult and so, for most people, not worth bothering with.

It may be as well now to make clear to those who do not already realise it, that by 'modern' poetry is not meant contemporary poetry in general. 'Modern' when used to describe any art-form has never connoted mere contemporaneity, but has always served as a comprehensive term for the ideas contained in such words as 'different', 'novel' and 'experimental'. All those artists, therefore, whose expression continues merely to maintain traditions of manner and matter which they themselves have done nothing to create but which are legacies from the past are

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not considered 'modern', and it is of no relevance to this point that they believe that past to be right in contrast with present standards and ideas.

So to-day there are separable groups of artists who have earned for themselves the right to be called 'modern' and to be adversely criticized by those contemporary critics who always do adversely criticize them just because they are 'modern' (and especially if they are young): thus Stephen Spender and W. H. Auden are modern poets, whereas Walter de la Mare and Edmund Blunden are not; William Walton and Bela Bartok are modern composers, Sibelius and Vaughan Williams are not; Stanley Spencer and Salvador Dali are modern painters, Augustus John and Dame Laura Knight are not.

It does not seem to me to be my duty here to analyse in detail the meaning of the word 'modern' thus applied, for this has been done elsewhere by poets themselves. Obvious differences exist between the poetry of John Masefield and Alfred Noyes, both contemporary poets, on the one hand and that of T. S. Eliot and Michael Roberts, both modern poets, on the other; but it is because only these obvious differences have been noted—and, I would say, superficially noted at that—that modern poets are all condemned by popular critics as unintelligible, and that the public, especially the younger public in schools and colleges, has seen too much past and merely contemporary poetry and almost none at all of that modern poetry which represents the living continuity of poetry.

As a schoolmaster I know that boys and girls are leaving the secondary schools thinking that poetry is the moribund hobby of antiquarians; and as a citizen I also know that most adults have the same idea. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' is still the *pièce de résistance* of the party, and the only contemporary verse that seems to be widely known and appreciated is the dance-tune 'lyric' and the music-hall 'monologue'. That those who know better are partly to blame for this lamentable state of affairs cannot be denied, and the teachers of poetry in schools

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and colleges need to release the muse from her chains as quickly as possible before it is too late and she dies.

For only by a wide reading of poetry of all ages and all kinds can anyone attain to an understanding of what, why and how poetry is; and so this collection has been made in order to convince those who need convincing—whether they are still at school or not—that so far from being an old-fashioned habit of certain famous men and women of the past and certain elderly or queer gentlemen and ladies of the present, poetry is still what it always has been and always must be, ever-young and dynamic.

Many modern poets are not represented in it, of course, for it is no more than an introductory selection—Edwin Muir, Herbert Palmer, Anne Ridler and Richard Church, for instance—but if the book is successful with those readers for whom it is first intended, then these poets too will be read in their turn.

W. G. B.

Since the first printing of this book Alun Lewis has been reported killed in an accident while on active service in India. He was twenty-six.—W. G. B.

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C. DAY LEWIS

Transitional Poem

When nature plays hedge-schoolmaster,
Shakes out the gaudy map of summer
And shows me charabanc, rose, barley-ear
And every bright-winged hummer,

He only would require of me
To be the sponge of natural laws
And learn no more of that cosmography
Than passes through the pores.

Why must I then unleash my brain
To sweat after some revelation
Behind the rose, heedless if truth maintain
On the rose-bloom her station?

When bullying April bruised mine eyes
With sleet-bound appetites and crude
Experiments of green, I still was wise
And kissed the blossoming rod.

Now summer brings what April took,
Riding with fanfares from the south,
And I should be no Solomon to look
My Sheba in the mouth.

Charabancs shout along the lane
And summer gales bay in the wood
No less superbly because I can't explain
What I have understood.

- ✓ Let logic analyse the hive,
Wisdom's content to have the honey:
So I'll go bite the crust of things and thrive
While hedge rows still are sunny.

A Time to Dance

For those who had the power
of the forest fires that burn
Leaving their source in ashes
to flush the sky with fire:
Those whom a famous urn
could not contain, whose passion
Brimmed over the deep grave
and dazzled epitaphs:
For all that have won us wings
to clear the tops of grief,
My friend who within me laughs
bids you dance and sing.

Some set out to explore
earth's limit, and little they recked if
Never their feet came near it
outgrowing the need for glory:
Some aimed at a small objective
but the fierce updraught of their spirit
Forced them to the stars.
Are honoured in public who built
The dam that tamed a river;
or holding the salient for hours
Against odds, cut off and killed,
are remembered by one survivor.

C. DAY LEWIS

All these. But most for those
whom accident made great,
As a radiant chance encounter
of cloud and sunlight grows
Immortal on the heart:
whose gift was the sudden bounty
Of a passing moment, enriches
the fulfilled eye for ever.
Their spirits float serene
above time's roughest reaches,
But their seed is in us and over
our lives they are evergreen.

Regency Houses

In the abandoned heaven
Light shrinks like pools on sand—
One in a million days
That dying where they stand
Image our last and leave an
Adored light behind.
Autumn is soon. We gaze
At a Regency terrace, curved
Like the ritual smile, resigned
and formidable, that's carved
On the stone face of the dead.
Shallow a breath divides us
From the formal-smiling dead.
Light leaves this shore, these shells,
The windows glazed in death,
And soon on us beneath
A first leaf falls,
And then the next night hides us.

We who in younger days,
Hoping too much, tried on
The habit of perfection,
Have learnt how it betrays
Our shrinking flesh: we have seen
The praised transparent will
Living now by reflection.
The panes darken: but still
We have seen peering out
The mad, too mobile face
Under the floral hat.
Are we living—we too,
Living extravagant farce
In the finery of spent passions?
Is all we do and shall do
But the glib, habitual breathing
Of clocks where time means nothing,
In a condemned mansion?

No. 1 of 'Overtures to Death'

For us, born into a world
Of fledged, instinctive trees,
Of lengthening days, snowfall at Christmas
And sentried palaces,

You were the one our parents
Could not forget or forgive—
A remittance man, a very very
Distant relative.

We read your name in the family
Bible. It was tabu
At meals and lessons, but in church sometimes
They seemed to be praying for you.

C. DAY LEWIS

You lived overseas, we gathered:
And often lying safe
In bed we thought of you, hearing the indrawn
Breath of the outcast surf.

Later we heard them saying
You had done well in the War.
And, though you never came home to us,
We saw your name everywhere.

When home grew unsympathetic,
You were all the rage for a while—
The favourite uncle with the blank-cheque-book
And the understanding smile.

Some of us went to look for you
In aeroplanes and fast cars:
Some tried the hospitals, some took to vice,
Others consulted the stars.

But now, sir, that you may be going
To visit us any night,
We watch the french windows, picturing you
In rather a different light.

The house, we perceive, is shabby,
There's dry-rot in the wood:
It's a poor welcome and it won't keep you out
And we wish we had been good.

But there's no time now for spring-cleaning
Or mending the broken clock,
We are here in the shrouded drawing-room till
Your first, your final knock.

Bombers

Through the vague morning, the heart preoccupied,
A deep in air buried grain of sound
Starts and grows, as yet unwarning—
The tremor of baited deepsea line.

Swells the seed, and now tight sound-buds
Vibrate, upholding their pæan flowers
To the sun. There are bees in sky-bells droning,
Flares of crimson at the heart unfold.

Children look up, and the elms spring-garlanded
Tossing their heads and marked for the axe.
Gallant or woebegone, alike unlucky—
Earth shakes beneath us: we imagine loss.

Black as vermin, crawling in echelon
Beneath the cloud-floor, the bombers come:
The heavy angels, carrying harm in
Their wombs that ache to be rid of death.

This is the seed that grows for ruin,
The iron embryo conceived in fear.
Soon or late its need must be answered
In fear delivered and screeching fire.

Choose between your child and this fatal embryo.
Shall your guilt bear arms, and the children you want
Be condemned to die by the powers you paid for
And haunt the houses you never built?

Part XXIX of 'From Feathers to Iron'

Come out in the sun, for a man is born to-day!
Early this morning whistle in the cutting told
Train was arriving, hours overdue, delayed
By snow-drifts, engine-trouble, Act of God, who cares now?—
For here alights the distinguished passenger.
Take a whole holiday in honour of this.

Kipfer's back from heaven, Bendien to Holland,
Larwood and Voce in the Notts eleven.
Returning also the father the mother,
Chastened and cheered by underworld excursion,
Alive returning from the black country,
Take a whole holiday in honour of this.

Now shall the airman vertically banking
Out of the blue write a new sky-sign;
The nine tramp steamers rusting in the estuary
Get up full pressure for a trade revival;
The crusty landlord renew the lease, and everyone
Take a whole holiday in honour of this.

To-day let director forget the deficit,
Schoolmaster his handicap, hostess her false face:
Let phantasiist take charge of flesh-and-blood situation,
Petty-officer be rapt in the Seventh Symphony.
For here a champion is born and commands you
Take a whole holiday in honour of this.

Wherever radiance from ashes arises—
Willowherb glowing on abandoned slagheaps,
Dawn budding scarlet in a bed of darkness,
Life from exhausted womb outstriving—
There shall the spirit be lightened and gratefully
Take a whole holiday in honour of this.

Section 24 of Part III of 'The Magnetic Mountain'

Tempt me no more; for I
Have known the lightning's hour,
The poet's inward pride,
The certainty of power.

Bayonets are closing round.
I shrink; yet I must wring
A living from despair
And out of steel a song.

Though song, though breath be short,
I'll share not the disgrace
Of those that ran away
Or never left the base.

Comrades, my tongue can speak
No comfortable words,
Calls to a forlorn hope,
Gives work and not rewards.

Oh keep the sickle sharp
And follow still the plough:
Others may reap, though some
See not the winter through.

Father, who endest all,
Pity our broken sleep;
For we lie down with tears
And waken but to weep.

And if our blood alone
Will melt this iron earth,
Take it. It is well spent
Easing a saviour's birth.

The Watching Post

A hill flank overlooking the Axe valley.
Among the stubble a farmer and I keep watch
For whatever may come to injure our countryside—
Light-signals, parachutes, bombs, or sea-invaders.
The moon looks over the hill's shoulder, and hope
Mans the old ramparts of an English night.

In a house down there was Marlborough born. One night
Monmouth marched to his ruin out of that valley.
Beneath our castled hill, where Britons kept watch,
Is a church where the Drakes, old lords of this countryside
Sleep under their painted effigies. No invaders
Can dispute their legacy of toughness and hope.

Two counties away, over Bristol, the searchlights hope
To find what danger is in the air to-night.
Presently gunfire from Portland reaches our valley
Tapping like an ill-hung door in a draught. My watch
Says nearly twelve. All over the countryside
Moon-dazzled men are peering out for invaders.

The farmer and I talked for a while of invaders:
But soon we turned to crops, the annual hope,
Making of cider, prizes for ewes. To-night
How many hearts along this war-mazed valley
Dream of a day when at peace they may work and watch
The small sufficient wonders of the countryside.

Image or fact, we both in the countryside
Have found our natural law, and until invaders
Come will answer its need: for both of us, hope
Means a harvest from small beginnings, who this night
While the moon sorts out into shadow and shape our valley,
A farmer and a poet, are keeping watch.

C. DAY LEWIS

The Stand-To

Autumn met me to-day as I walked over Castle Hill.
The wind that had set our corn by the ears was blowing still:
Autumn, who takes the leaves and the long days, crisped the air
With a tang of action, a taste of death; and the wind blew fair

From the east for men and barges massed on the other side—
Men maddened by numbers or stolid by nature, they have their
pride
As we in work and children, but now a contracting will
Crumples their meek petitions and holds them poised to kill.

Last night a Stand-To was ordered. Thirty men of us here
Came out to guard the star-lit village—my men who wear
Unwitting the season's beauty, the received truth of the spade—
Roadmen, farm labourers, masons, turned to another trade.

A dog barked over the fields, the candle stars put a sheen
On the rifles ready, the sandbags fronded with evergreen:
The dawn wind blew, the stars winked out on the posts where
we lay,
The order came, Stand Down, and thirty went away.

Since a cold wind from Europe blows back the words in my teeth,
Since autumn shortens the days and the odds against our death,
And the harvest moon is waxing and high tides threaten harm,
Since last night may be the last night all thirty men go home,

I write this verse to record the men who have watched with me—
Spot who is good at darts, Squibby at repartee,
Mark and Cyril, the dead shots, Ralph with a ploughman's gait,
Gibson, Harris and Long, old hands for the barricade,

C. DAY LEWIS

Whiller the lorry-driver, Francis and Rattlesnake,
Fred and Charl and Stan—these nights I have lain awake
And thought of my thirty men and the autumn wind that blows
The apples down too early and shatters the autumn rose.

Destiny, History, Duty, Fortitude, Honour—all
The words of the politicians seem too big or too small
For the ragtag fighters of lane and shadow, the love that has
 grown
Familiar as working-clothes, faithful as bone to bone.

Blow, autumn wind, upon orchard and rose! Blow leaves along
Our lanes, but sing through me for the lives that are worth a
 song!

Narrowing days have darkened the vistas that hurt my eyes,
But pinned to the heart of darkness a tattered fire-flag flies.

T. S. ELIOT

Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer

Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer were a very notorious couple of cats.

As knockabout clowns, quickchange comedians, tight-rope walkers and acrobats

They had an extensive reputation. They made their home in Victoria Grove—

That was merely their centre of operation, for they were incurably given to rove.

They were very well known in Cornwall Gardens, in Launceston Place and in Kensington Square—

They had really a little more reputation than a couple of cats can very well bear.

If the area window was found ajar

And the basement looked like a field of war,

If a tile or two came loose on the roof,

Which presently ceased to be waterproof,

If the drawers were pulled out from the bedroom chests,

And you couldn't find one of your winter's vests,

Or after supper one of the girls

Suddenly missed her Woolworth pearls:

Then the family would say: 'It's that horrible cat!

It was Mungojerrie—or Rumpelteazer!'—And most of the time they left it^T at that.

Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer had a very unusual gift of the gab.

They were highly efficient cat-burglars as well, and remarkably smart at a smash-and-grab.

T. S. ELIOT

They made their home in Victoria Grove. They had no regular occupation.

They were plausible fellows, and liked to engage a friendly policeman in conversation.

When the family assembled for Sunday dinner,
With their minds made up that they wouldn't get thinner
On Argentine joint, potatoes and greens,
And the cook would appear from behind the scenes
And say in a voice that was broken in sorrow:
'I'm afraid you must wait and have dinner *tomorrow*
For the joint has gone from the oven—like that!'
Then the family would say: 'It's that horrible cat!
It was Mungojerrie—or Rumpelteazer!'—And most of the time
they left it at that.

Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer had a wonderful way of working
together.

And some of the time you would say it was luck, and some of the
time you would say it was weather.

They would go through the house like a hurricane, and no sober
person could take his oath

Was it Mungojerrie—or Rumpelteazer? or could you have sworn
that it mightn't be both?

And when you heard a dining-room smash

Or up from the pantry there came a loud crash

Or down from the library came a loud *ping*

From a vase which was commonly said to be Ming—

Then the family would say: 'Now which was which cat?

It was Mungojerrie! AND Rumpelteazer!'—And there's nothing
at all to be done about that!

Macavity: The Mystery Cat

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw—
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime—*Macavity's not there!*

Macavity, Macavity, there's no-one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime—*Macavity's not there!*
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air—
But I tell you once and once again, *Macavity's not there!*

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a
snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no-one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square—
But when a crime's discovered, then *Macavity's not there!*

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair—
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! *Macavity's not there!*

T. S. ELIOT

And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair—
But it's useless to investigate—*Macavity's not there!*
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
'It *must* have been Macavity!'—but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumbs,
Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no-one like Macavity,
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:
At whatever time the deed took place—MACAVITY WASN'T
THERE!

And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely
known

(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!

Morning at the Window

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,
And along the trampled edges of the street
I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids
Sprouting despondently at area gates.

The brown waves of fog toss up to me
Twisted faces from the bottom of the street,
And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts
An aimless smile that hovers in the air
And vanishes along the level of the roofs.

T. S. ELIOT

Cousin Nancy

Miss Nancy Ellicott
Strode across the hills and broke them,
Rode across the hills and broke them—
The barren New England hills—
Riding to hounds
Over the cow-pasture.

Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked
And danced all the modern dances;
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,
But they knew that it was modern.

Upon the glazen shelves kept watch
Matthew and Waldo, guardians of the faith,
The army of unalterable law.

Conversation Galante

I observe: 'Our sentimental friend the moon!
Or possibly (fantastic, I confess)
It may be Prester John's balloon
Or an old battered lantern hung aloft
To light poor travellers to their distress.'
She then: 'How you digress.'

And I then: 'Someone frames upon the keys
That exquisite nocturne, with which we explain
The night and moonshine; music which we seize
To body forth our own vacuity.'
She then: 'Does this refer to me?'
'Oh no, it is I who am inane.'

'You, madame, are the eternal humorist,
The eternal enemy of the absolute,
Giving our vagrant moods the slightest twist!
With your air indifferent and imperious
At a stroke our mad poetics to confute—'
And—'Are we then so serious?'

Journey of the Magi

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,

T. S. ELIOT

And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

No. III of 'Five-finger exercises' *Lines to a Duck in a Park*

The long light shakes across the lake,
The forces of the morning quake,
The dawn is slant across the lawn,
Here is no eft or mortal snake
But only sluggish duck and drake.
I have seen the morning shine,
I have had the Bread and Wine,
Let the feathered mortals take
That which is their mortal due,

Pinching bread and finger too,
Easier had than squirming worm;
For I know, and so should you
That soon the enquiring worm shall try
Our well-preserved complacency.

No. 6 of Choruses from 'The Rock'

It is hard for those who have never known persecution,
And who have never known a Christian,
To believe these tales of Christian persecution.
It is hard for those who live near a Bank
To doubt the security of their money.
It is hard for those who live near a Police Station
To believe in the triumph of violence.
Do you think that the Faith has conquered the World
And that lions no longer need keepers?
Do you need to be told that whatever has been, can still be?
Do you need to be told that even such modest attainments,
As you can boast in the way of polite society
Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their
significance?
Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;
Women! polish your fingernails:
You polish the tooth of the dog and the talon of the cat.
Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her
laws?
She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they would forget.
She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they
like to be soft.
She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant facts.
They constantly try to escape
From the darkness outside and within

T. S. ELIOT

By dreaming of systems so perfect that no-one will need to be good.

But the man that is will shadow

The man that pretends to be.

And the Son of Man was not crucified once for all,

The blood of the Martyrs not shed once for all,

The lives of the Saints not given once for all:

But the Son of Man is crucified always

And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.

And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps

We must first build the steps;

And if the Temple is to be cast down

We must first build the Temple.

Two Choruses from 'Murder in the Cathedral'

I

Does the bird sing in the South?

Only the sea-bird cries, driven inland by the storm.

What sign of the spring of the year?

Only the death of the old: not a stir, not a shoot, not a breath.

Do the days begin to lengthen?

Longer and darker the day, shorter and colder the night.

Still and stifling the air: but a wind is stored up in the East.

The starved crow sits in the field, attentive; and in the wood

The owl rehearses the hollow note of death.

What signs of a bitter spring?

The wind stored up in the East.

What, at the time of the birth of our Lord, at Christmastide,

Is there not peace upon earth, goodwill among men?

The peace of this world is always uncertain, unless men keep
the peace of God.

And war among men defiles this world, but death in the Lord
renews it

T. S. ELIOT

And the world must be cleaned in the winter, or we shall have
only

A sour spring, a parched summer, an empty harvest.
Between Christmas and Easter what work shall be done?
The ploughman shall go out in March and turn the same earth
He has turned before, the bird shall sing the same song.
When the leaf is out on the tree, when the elder and may
Burst over the stream, and the air is clear and high,
And voices trill at windows, and children tumble in front of the
door,
What work shall have been done, what wrong
Shall the bird's song cover, the green tree cover, what wrong
Shall the fresh earth cover? We wait, and the time is short
But waiting is long.

II

*Chorus (while a Dies Irae is sung in Latin by a choir in
the distance)*

Numb the hand and dry the eyelid,
Still the horror, but more horror
Than when tearing in the belly.

Still the horror, but more horror
Than when twisting in the fingers,
Than when splitting in the skull.

More than footfall in the passage,
More than shadow in the doorway,
More than fury in the hall.

The agents of hell disappear, the human, they shrink and dissolve
Into dust on the wind, forgotten, unmemorable; only is here
The white flat face of Death, God's silent servant,
And behind the face of Death the Judgement

T. S. ELIOT

And behind the Judgement the Void, more horrid than active
shapes of hell;

Emptiness, absence, separation from God;

The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land

Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void,

Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind

To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence,

Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects,
no tones,

No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul

From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with nothing,

Not what we call death, but what beyond death is not death,

We fear, we fear. Who shall then plead for me,

Who intercede for me, in my most need?

Dead upon the tree, my Saviour,

Yet not be in vain Thy labour;

Help me, Lord, in my last fear.

Dust I am, to dust am bending,

From the final doom impending

Help me, Lord, for death is near.

WILLIAM EMPSON

Manchouli

I find it normal, passing these great frontiers,
That you scan the crowds in rags eagerly each side
With awe; that the nations seem real; that their ambitions
Having such achieved variety within one type, seem sane;
I find it normal;
So too to extract false comfort from that word.

Anecdote from Talk

John Watson was tin-mine man
An expert of his kind.
He worked up country in Malaya
On whisky, not resigned,
On whisky but not blind.

He told a friend he felt like death,
And what you say's repeated.
The manager says 'I just sent for him
With "Here's ten dollars, beat it

For Christ's sake to Singapore.
I'm glad to pay the fare.
Just think of the nuisance, man, for me,
If you pass out here".

Next day John Watson tapped the door
With "Right, take my gun.

WILLIAM EMPSON

You've changed my mind, I mean to live".

"I'll keep any gun.

But I'll keep no madman".'

'This is the funny part', the manager says,

'He was shot just the same.

Of course I had to pass him to a dicky job.

Just the natives, no-one to blame.

But it was quick how it came.

Three weeks'.

STEPHEN SPENDER

The Past Values

Alas for the sad standards
In the eyes of the old master
Sprouting through glaze of their pictures!

For what we stare at through glass
Opens on to our running time:
As nature spilled before the summer mansion
Pours through windows in on our dimension.

And the propeller's rigid transparent flicker
To airman over continental ranges
Between him and the towns and river
Spells dynamics of this rotating
Age of invention, too rapid for sight.

Varnish over paint and dust across glass:
Stare back, remote, the static drum;
The locked ripeness of the Centaurs' feast;
The blowing flags, frozen stiff
In a cracked fog, and the facing
Reproach of self-portraits.

Alas for the sad standards
In the eyes of the freshly dead young
Sprawled in the mud of battle.
Stare back, stare back, with dust over glazed
Eyes, their gaze at partridges,
Their dreams of girls, and their collected
Faith in home, wound up like a little watch.

STEPHEN SPENDER

To ram them outside time, violence
Of wills that ride the cresting day
Struck them with lead so swift
Their falling sight stared through its glass.
Our sight stares back on death, like glass
Infringing the rigid eyes with toneless glaze,
Sinking stretched bodies inch-deep in their frames.

Through glass their eyes meet ours
Like standards of the masters
That shock us with their peace.

Thoughts During an Air Raid

Of course, the entire effort is to put myself
Outside the ordinary range
Of what are called statistics. A hundred are killed
In the outer suburbs. Well, well, I carry on.
So long as the great 'I' is propped upon
This girdered bed which seems more like a hearse,
In the hotel bedroom with flowering wallpaper
Which rings in wreathes above, I can ignore
The pressure of those names under my fingers
Heavy and black as I rustle the paper,
The wireless wail in the lounge margin.
Yet supposing that a bomb should dive
Its nose right through this bed, with me upon it?
The thought is obscene. Still, there are many
To whom my name would only be a name,
One figure in a column. The essential is
That all the 'I's should remain separate
Propped under flowers, and no-one suffer
For his neighbour. Then horror is postponed

STEPHEN SPENDER

For everyone until it settles on him
And drags him to that incommunicable grief
Which is all mystery or nothing.

Two Armies

Deep in the winter plain, two armies
Dig their machinery, to destroy each other.
Men freeze and hunger. No-one is given leave
On either side, except the dead, and wounded.
These have their leave; while new battalions wait
On time at last to bring them violent peace.

All have become so nervous and so cold
That each man hates the cause and distant words
Which brought him here, more terribly than bullets.
Once a boy hummed a popular marching song,
Once a novice hand flapped the salute;
The voice was choked, the lifted hand fell,
Shot through the wrist by those of his own side.

From their numb harvest all would flee, except
For discipline drilled once in an iron school
Which holds them at the point of a revolver.
Yet when they sleep, the images of home
Ride wishing horses of escape
Which herd the plain in a mass unspoken poem.

Finally they cease to hate: for although hate
Bursts from the air and whips the earth like hail
Or pours it up in fountains to marvel at,
And although hundreds fall, who can connect
The inexhaustible anger of the guns
With the dumb patience of these tormented animals?

STEPHEN SPENDER

Clean silence drops at night when a little walk
Divides the sleeping armies, each
Huddled in linen woven by remote hands.
When the machines are stilled, a common suffering
Whitens the air with breath and makes both one
As though these enemies slept in each other's arms.

Only the lucid friend to aerial raiders,
The brilliant pilot moon, stares down
Upon the plain she makes a shining bone
Cut by the shadow of many thousand bones.
Where amber clouds scatter on no-man's-land
She regards death and time throw up
The furious words and minerals which kill life.

Port Bou

As a child holds a pet
Arms clutching but with hands that do not join
And the coiled animal watches the gap
To outer freedom in animal air,
So the earth-and-rock flesh arms of this harbour
Embrace but do not enclose the sea
Which, through a gap, vibrates to the open sea
Where ships and dolphins swim and above is the sun.
In the bright winter sunlight I sit on the stone parapet
Of a bridge; my circling arms rest on a newspaper
Empty in my mind as the glittering stone
Because I search for an image
And seeing an image I count out the coined words
To remember the childish headlands of this harbour.
A lorry halts beside me with creaking brakes
And I look up at warm waving flag-like faces

STEPHEN SPENDER

Of militiamen staring down at my French newspaper.
'How do they speak of our struggle, over the frontier?'
I hold out the paper, but they refuse,
They did not ask for anything so precious
But only for friendly words and to offer me cigarettes.
In their smiling faces the war finds peace, the famished mouths
Of the rusty carbines brush against their trousers
Almost as fragilely as reeds;
And wrapped in a cloth—old mother in a shawl—
The terrible machine-gun rests.
They shout, salute back as the truck jerks forward
Over the vigorous hill, beyond the headland.
An old man passes, his running mouth,
With three teeth like bullets, spits out 'pom-pom-pom'.
The children run after; and, more slowly, the women
Clutching their clothes, follow over the hill;
Till the village is empty, for the firing practice,
And I am left alone on the bridge at the exact centre
Where the cleaving river trickles like saliva.
At the exact centre, solitary as a target,
Where nothing moves against a background of cardboard houses
Except the disgraceful skirring dogs; and the firing begins,
Across the harbour mouth from headland to headland,
White flecks of foam gashed by lead in the sea;
And the echo trails over its iron lash
Whipping the flanks of the surrounding hills.
My circling arms rest on the newspaper,
My mind seems paper where dust and ink fall,
I tell myself the shooting is only for practice,
And my body seems a cloth which the machine-gun stitches
Like a sewing machine, neatly, with cotton from a reel;
And the solitary, irregular, thin 'puffs' from the carbines
Draw on long needles white threads through my navel.

STEPHEN SPENDER

To Poets and Airmen

(Dedicated to Michael Jones in his life, and now in his memory)

Thinkers and airmen—all such
Friends and pilots upon the edge
Of the skies of the future—much
You require a bullet's eye of courage
To fly through this age.

The paper brows are winged and helmeted,
The blind ankles bound to a white road
Streaming through a night of lead
Where cities explode.
Fates unload

Hatred burning, in small parcels,
Outrage against social lies,
Hearts breaking against past refusals
Of men to show small mercies
To men. Now death replies
Releasing new, familiar devils.

And yet, before you throw away your childhood,
With the lambs pasturing in flaxen hair,
To plunge into this iron war,
Remember for a flash the wild good
Drunkenness where
You abandoned future care,

And then forget. Become what
Things require. The expletive word.
The all-night-long screeching metal bird.
And all of time shut down in one shot
Of night, by a gun uttered.

STEPHEN SPENDER

The Air Raid Across the Bay

I

Above the dead flat sea
And watching rocks of black coast
Across the bay, the high
Searchlights probe the centre of the sky
Their ends fusing in cones of light
For a brilliant instant held up
Then shattered like a cup.

They rub white rules through leaden dark,
Projecting tall phantom
Masts with swaying derricks
Above the sea's broad level decks.

They slide triangles and parallels
Of experimental theorems,
Proving the hypothesis
Of death, on wasted surfaces
Of measureless blank distances.

II

But through their gliding light-streams,
An invisible ragged sound
Moves, trailed by two distraught beams.
A thudding falls from remote cones
And pink sequins wink from a shot-silk screen.

Seeds of killing drop on cells of sleep
Which hug these promontories like dark-brown wrinkles.

Fingers pick away
Human minds from hollow skulls.

STEPHEN SPENDER

III

The shining ladders slant
Up to the god of war
Exalted on those golden stilts
And riding in his car
Of a destroying star.

But the waves clucking in the rocks
And the sacred standing corn
Brittle, and swaying with metallic clicks,
Their secret wealth lock
In an elemental magic
Of ripeness, which mocks
The nails through flesh torn.

A Childhood

I am glad I met you on the edge
Of your barbarous childhood.

In what purity of pleasure
You danced along like a peasant
For the stamping joy's own sake!

How, set in their sandy sockets,
Your clear truthful transparent eyes
Shone out of the black frozen landscape
Of those grey-clothed schoolboys!

How your shy hand offered
The total generosity
Of original unforewarned fearful trust,
In a world grown old in iron hatred!

STEPHEN SPENDER

I am glad to set down
The first and ultimate you,
Your inescapable soul. Although
It fade like a fading smile
Or light falling from faces
Which some grimmer preoccupation replaces.

This happens everywhere at every time:
Joy lacks the cause of joy,
Love the answering love,
And truth the objectless persistent loneliness,
As they grow older,
To become later what they were
In childhood earlier—
In a grown-up world of cheating compromises.

Childhood, its own flower,
Flushes from the grasses with no reason
Except the sky of that season.
But the grown desires need objects
And taste of these corrupts the tongue
And the natural need is scattered
Amongst satisfactions which satisfy
A debased need.

Yet all prayers are on the side of
Giving strength to innocence,
So I pray for nothing new,
I pray only, after such knowledge,
That you may have the strength to become you.

And I shall remember
You, who, being younger,
Will probably forget.

STEPHEN SPENDER

My Parents

My parents kept me from children who were rough
And who threw words like stones and who wore torn clothes.
Their thighs showed through rags. They ran in the street
And climbed cliffs and stripped by the country streams.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron
And their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arms.
I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys
Who copied my lisp behind me on the road.

They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges
Like dogs to bark at our world. They threw mud
And I looked another way, pretending to smile.
I longed to forgive them, yet they never smiled.

In Railway Halls

In railway halls, on pavements near the traffic,
They beg, their eyes made big by empty staring
And only measuring Time, like the blank clock.

No, I shall weave no tracery of pen-ornament
To make them birds upon my singing-tree:
Time merely drives these lives which do not live
As tides push rotten stuff along the shore.

—There is no consolation, no, none
In the curving beauty of that line
Traced on our graphs through history, where the oppressor
Starves and deprives the poor.

STEPHEN SPENDER

Paint here no draped despairs, no saddening clouds
Where the soul rests, proclaims eternity.
But let the wrong cry out as raw as wounds
This Time forgets and never heals, far less transcends.

Trial of a Judge

(from Act 4, during trial by the Fascists of the Red prisoners and the Judge, who speaks in answer to Hummeldorf's question, 'What has the prisoner to say?')

JUDGE: That I am guilty.
For by your law, the jungle
Is established; and the tiger's safety is guaranteed
When he hunts his innocent victim,
By all the iron of the police.
I condemned to death gunmen
And gangsters, but they are
The highest functions of this society;
Except perhaps for machine guns and those inhuman
Instruments of killing
Which are more powerful even than your fangs
Devoid of pity and the human spirit—
As indeed the time may show.
Where death is esteemed so highly,
Where death's administrators are the nation's ministers,
Here in death's court, judged by death's slaves,
I should be flattered to die: perhaps I am.
You would scarcely offer a more glittering honour.
I appeal to those
Who have sent the ambassadors of their powers
Into this room which well may be the tomb
Of justice for us and them

STEPHEN SPENDER

Not to conceal their horror
At the usurping of law by lawlessness
Itself made into law
To justify Petra's murder.
Let them speak as witnesses
That I am killed for nothing worse
Than my indignation against murderers,
My pity for those three who did no murder.
Let them note well my tragic error
Fatal to repeat
When I renounced my public anger
Before imagined expediency.
Then let them turn their faces to a future
Of solemn words broken by rule,
Of spiritual words burned up with libraries
And the triumph of injustice;
Of tyrants who send their messages of terror
Against the civilized and helpless.
O let them witness
That my fate is the angel of their fate,
The angel of Europe,
And the spirit of Europe destroyed with my defeat.

W. H. AUDEN

The Capital

Quarter of pleasures where the rich are always waiting,
Waiting expensively for miracles to happen,
O little restaurant where the lovers eat each other,
Café where exiles have established a malicious village;

You with your charm and your apparatus have abolished
The strictness of winter and the spring's compulsion;
Far from your lights the outraged punitive father,
The dullness of mere obedience here is apparent.

Yet with orchestras and glances, O, you betray us
To belief in our infinite powers; and the innocent
Unobservant offender falls in a moment
Victim to the heart's invisible furies.

In unlighted streets you hide away the appalling;
Factories where lives are made for a temporary use
Like collars or chairs, rooms where the lonely are battered
Slowly like pebbles into fortuitous shapes.

But the sky you illumine, your glow is visible far
Into the dark countryside, the enormous, the frozen,
Where, hinting at the forbidden like a wicked uncle,
Night after night to the farmer's children you beckon.

As I Walked Out One Evening

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under an arch of the railway:
'Love has no ending.

I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street.

I'll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
And the seven stars go squawking
Like geese about the sky.

The years shall run like rabbits
For in my arms I hold
The Flower of the Ages
And the first love of the world.'

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
'O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.

In the burrows of the Nightmare
Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or to-day.

Into many a green valley
Drifts the appalling snow;
Time breaks the threaded dances
And the diver's brilliant bow.

O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you've missed.

The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer
And Jill goes down on her back.

O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress;
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.

O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart.'

W. H. AUDEN

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming
And the deep river ran on.

James Honeyman

James Honeyman was a silent child
He didn't laugh or cry;
He looked at his mother
With curiosity.

Mother came up to the nursery,
Peeped through the open door,
Saw him striking matches
Sitting on the nursery floor.

He went to the children's party,
The buns were full of cream;
Sat dissolving sugar
In his tea-cup in a dream.

On his eighth birthday
Didn't care that the day was wet
For by his bedside
Lay a ten-shilling chemistry set.

Teacher said: 'James Honeyman's
The cleverest boy we've had,
But he doesn't play with the others
And that, I think, is sad.'

While the other boys played football
He worked in the laboratory
Got a scholarship to college,
And a first-class degree.

Kept awake with black coffee,
Took to wearing glasses,
Writing a thesis
On the toxic gases.

Went out into the country,
Went by Green Line bus,
Walked on the Chilterns,
Thought about Phosphorus.

Said: 'Lewisite in its day
Was pretty decent stuff,
But under modern conditions
It's not nearly strong enough.'

His Tutor sipped his port,
Said: 'I think it's clear
That young James Honeyman's
The most brilliant man of his year.'

He got a job in research
With Imperial Alkali
Said to himself while shaving:
'I'll be famous before I die.'

His landlady said: 'Mr. Honeyman,
You've only got one life,
You ought to have some fun, Sir.
You ought to find a wife.'

At Imperial Alkali
There was a girl called Doreen,
One day she cut her finger,
Asked him for iodine.

'I'm feeling faint,' she said.
He led her to a chair,
Fetched her a glass of water,
Wanted to stroke her hair.

They took a villa on the Great West Road,
Painted green and white;
On their left a United Dairy,
A cinema on their right.

At the bottom of his garden
He built a little shed.
'He's going to blow us up,'
All the neighbours said.

Doreen called down at midnight
'Jim dear, it's time for bed.'
'I'll finish my experiment
And then I'll come,' he said.

Caught influenza at Christmas,
The Doctor said: 'Go to bed.'
'I'll finish my experiment
And then I'll go,' he said.

Walked out on Sundays,
Helped to push the pram,
Said: 'I'm looking for a gas, dear;
A whiff will kill a man.

'I'm going to find it,
That's what I'm going to do.'
Doreen squeezed his hand and said:
'Jim, I believe in you.'

In the hot nights of summer
When the roses were all red
James Honeyman was working
In his little garden shed.

Came upstairs at midnight,
Kissed his sleeping son,
Held up a sealed glass test-tube,
Said: 'Look, Doreen, I've won!'

They stood together by the window,
The moon was bright and clear.
He said: 'At last I've done something
That's worthy of you, dear.'

Took a train next morning,
Went up to Whitehall
With the phial in his pocket
To show it to them all.

Sent in his card,
The officials only swore:
'Tell him we're very busy
And show him the door.'

Doreen said to the neighbours:
'Isn't it a shame?
My husband's so clever
And they didn't know his name.'

W. H. AUDEN

One neighbour was sympathetic,
Her name was Mrs. Flower.
She was the agent
Of a foreign power.

One evening they sat at supper,
There came a gentle knock:
'A gentleman to see Mr. Honeyman.'
He stayed till eleven o'clock.

They walked down the garden together,
Down to the little shed:
'We'll see you, then, in Paris.
Good night,' the gentleman said.

The boat was nearing Dover
He looked back at Calais:
Said: 'Honeyman's N.P.C.
Will be heard of, some day.'

He was sitting in the garden
Writing notes on a pad,
Their little son was playing
Round his mother and dad.

Suddenly from the east
Some aeroplanes appeared,
Somebody screamed: 'They're bombers!
War must have been declared!'

The first bomb hit the Dairy,
The second the cinema,
The third fell in the garden
Just like a falling star.

W. H. AUDEN

'Oh kiss me, Mother, kiss me,
And tuck me up in bed
For Daddy's invention
Is going to choke me dead!'

'Where are you, James, where are you?
Oh put your arms around me,
For my lungs are full
Of Honeyman's N.P.C.!'

'I wish I were a salmon
Swimming in the sea,
I wish I were the dove
That coos upon the tree.'

'Oh you are not a salmon,
Oh you are not a dove;
But you invented the vapour
That is killing those you love.'

'Oh hide me in the mountains,
Oh drown me in the sea.
Lock me in the dungeon
And throw away the key.'

'Oh you can't hide in the mountains,
Oh you can't drown in the sea,
But you must die, and you know why,
By Honeyman's N.P.C.'

Refugee Blues

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look at the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said:
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead':
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where shall we go
to-day?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread';
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you
and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: 'They must die';
O we were in his mind, my dear, O we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't
German Jews.

W. H. AUDEN

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human
race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

September 1, 1939

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

W. H. AUDEN

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled, Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours in vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

W. H. AUDEN

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
'I *will* be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work,'
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

W. H. AUDEN

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no-one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironical points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

O what is that sound which so thrills the ear

O what is that sound which so thrills the ear
Down in the valley drumming, drumming?
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,
The soldiers coming.

O what is that light I see flashing so clear
Over the distance brightly, brightly?
Only the sun on their weapons, dear,
As they step lightly.

W. H. AUDEN

O what are they doing with all that gear;
What are they doing this morning, **this morning?**
Only the usual manoeuvres, dear,
Or perhaps a warning.

O why have they left the road down there;
Why are they suddenly wheeling, wheeling?
Perhaps a change in the orders, dear;
Why are you kneeling?

O haven't they stopped for the doctor's care;
Haven't they reined their horses, their horses?
Why, they are none of them wounded, dear,
None of these forces.

O is it the parson they want with white hair;
Is it the parson, is it, is it?
No, they are passing his gateway, dear,
Without a visit.

O it must be the farmer who lives so near;
It must be the farmer so cunning, so cunning?
They have passed the farm already, dear,
And now they are running.

O where are you going? stay with me here!
Were the vows you swore me deceiving, deceiving?
No, I promised to love you, dear,
But I must be leaving.

O it's broken the lock and splintered the door,
O it's the gate where they're turning, turning;
Their feet are heavy on the floor
And their eyes are burning.

A shilling life will give you all the facts

A shilling life will give you all the facts:
How Father beat him, how he ran away,
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts
Made him the greatest figure of his day:
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,
Though giddy, climbed new mountains; named a sea:
Some of the last researchers even write
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

With all his honours on, he sighed for one
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still
Or potter round the garden; answered some
Of his long marvellous letters but kept none.

*The Opening Chorus of
'The Dog Beneath the Skin'*

The Summer holds: upon its glittering lake
Lie Europe and the islands; many rivers
Wrinkling its surface like a ploughman's palm.
Under the bellies of the grazing horses
On the far side of posts and bridges
The vigorous shadows dwindle; nothing wavers.
Calm at this moment the Dutch sea so shallow
That sunk St. Paul's would ever show its golden cross
And still the deep water that divides us still from Norway.
We would show you at first an English village: You shall choose
its location

W. H. AUDEN

Wherever your heart directs you most longingly to look; you
are loving towards it:

Whether north to Scots Gap and Billingham where the black
rams defy the panting engine:

Or west to the Welsh Marches; to the lilting speech and the
magicians' faces:

Wherever you were a child or had your first affair

There it stands amidst your darling scenery:

A parish bounded by the wreckers' cliff; or meadows

Where browse the Shorthorn and the maplike Friesian

As at Trent Junction where the Soar comes gliding; out of green

Leicestershire to swell the ampler current.

Hiker with sunburn blisters on your office pallor,

Cross-country champion with corks in your hands,

When you have eaten your sandwich, your salt and your apple,

When you have begged your glass of milk from the ill-kept farm,

What is it you see?

I see barns falling, fences broken,

Pasture not ploughland, weeds not wheat.

The great houses remain but only half are inhabited,

Dusty the gunrooms and the stable clocks stationary.

Some have been turned into prep-schools where the diet is in
the hands of an experienced matron.

Others into club-houses for the golf-bore and the top-hole.

Those who sang in the inns at evening have departed; they saw
their hope in another country,

Their children have entered the service of the suburban areas;
they have become typists, mannequins and factory opera-
tives; they desired a different rhythm of life.

But their places are taken by another population, with views
about nature,

Brought in charabanc and saloon along arterial roads;

Tourists to whom the Tudor cafés

Offer Bovril and buns upon Breton ware
With leather work as a sideline: Filling stations
Supply petrol from rustic pumps.
Those who fancy themselves as foxes or desire a special setting
for spooning
Erect their villas at the right places,
Airtight, lighted, elaborately warmed;
And nervous people who will never marry
Live upon dividends in the old-world cottages
With an animal for friend or a volume of memoirs.

Man is changed by his living; but not fast enough.
His concern to-day is for that which yesterday did not occur.
In the hour of the Blue Bird and the Bristol Bomber, his thoughts
are appropriate to the years of the Penny Farthing:
He tosses at night who at noonday found no truth.

Extract from Act 1 of 'The Ascent of F 6'

Mr. A. No, nothing that matters will ever happen;
Nothing you'd want to put in a book;
Nothing to tell to impress your friends—
The old old story that never ends:
The eight o'clock train, the customary place,
Holding the paper in front of your face,
The public stairs, the glass swing-door,
The peg for your hat, the linoleum floor,
The office stool and the office jokes
And the fear in your ribs that slyly pokes:
Are they satisfied with you?
Nothing interesting to do,
Nothing interesting to say,
Nothing remarkable in any way;

W. H. AUDEN

Then the journey home again
In the hot suburban train
To the tawdry new estate,
Crumpled, grubby, dazed and late:
Home to supper and to bed.
Shall we be like this when we are dead?

GEORGE BARKER

Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult

It was when weather was Arabian I went
Over the downs to Alton where winds were wounded
With flowers and swathed me with aroma, I walked
Like Saint Christopher Columbus through a sea's welter
Of gaudy ways looking for a wonder.

Who was I, who knows, no-one when I started,
No more than the youth who takes longish strides,
Gay with a girl and obstreperous with strangers,
Fond of some songs, not unusually stupid,
I ascend hills anticipating the strange.

Looking for a wonder I went on a Monday,
Meandering over the Alton down and moor;
When was it I went, an hour a year or more,
That Monday back, I cannot remember.
I only remember I went in a gay mood.

Hollyhock here and rock and rose there were,
I wound among them knowing they were no wonder;
And the bird with a worm and the fox in a wood
Went flying and flurrying in front, but I was
Wanting a worse wonder, a rarer one.

So I went on expecting miraculous catastrophe.
What it is, I whispered, shall I capture a creature
A woman for a wife, or find myself a king,
Sleep and awake to find Sleep is my kingdom?
How shall I know my marvel when it comes?

Then after long striding and ^RKing I was
 I had so long longed to be, in the world's wide
 At the hill's top, with no more ground to wander
 Excepting downward, and I had found no wonder.
 Found only the sorrow that I had missed my marvel.

Then I remembered, was it the bird or worm,
 The hollyhock, the flower or the strong rock,
 Was it the mere dream of the man and woman
 Made me a marvel? It was not. It was
 When on the hilltop I stood in the world's wind.

The world is my wonder, where the wind
 Wanders like wind, and where the rock is
 Rock. And man and woman flesh on a dream.
 I look from my hill with the woods behind,
 And Time, a sea's chaos, below.

Bamborough Castle

Here where no house no home is I stand
 Looking down the sea lines of the island;
 The mountains against the shore where the lion's locks
 Engarland in gold coils the great rocks,
 And the flower precariously over the cliff leans.
 I stand taking the air of the fountaining sea
 That sends up its salt and foam over me,
 While westward where no winds pester, the gulls
 Fall slowly downward, and rest on the waves' hands.

Yes and behind me I hear the sorethroated crows
 Creating their ruins of sound in the air by the ruins;
 By Bamborough's ruins they rise and brood, or
 Poised in the air roar down at Promethean stone.

E BARKER

Never an excrement of blood as they pass,
Their cries to crack the rock like glass:
The stone holds and the blood's white, and I, alone,
Can discern the Bamborough mass,
See wall and window and all as solid as stone,
No mess of blood smearing the gutted face.

Then I know what it is I look upon like a ruin,
The dilapidated palace on the promontory,
I know what each stone is, and the Portland walls,
The well like flute and diseased dungeon cells.
What is it but me, but you, but you all—
Any man's many of days that make my life.
His day stones and year walls and his tower,
His well of love and festering cells of evil,
All worn dangerous to trespassers; and the ghosts
The consumptive and prophetic crows infest,
Investing his pile with mess, their cries
Threatening to raze him like the glass's bubble.

There where no house no home is I stood,
Bamborough I, cracked and crowned with blood;
Disfigured by the birds I knew were no birds,
But the heart haunting human who kills with words.

The Leaping Laughters

When will men again
Lift irresistible fists
Not bend from ends
But each man lift men
Nearer again.

GEORGE BARKER

Many men mean
Well; but tall walls
Impede, their hands bleed and
They fall, their seed the
Seed of the fallen.

See here the fallen
Stooping over stones, over their
Own bones: but all
Stooping doom beaten.

Whom the noonday washes
Whole, whom the heavens compel,
And to whom pass immaculate messages,
When will men again
Lift irresistible fists
Impede impediments
Leap mountains, laugh at walls?

To T. S. Eliot

Expecting a bomb or angel through the roof,
Cold as a saint in Canterbury Cathedral,
This gentleman with Adam on his mind
Sits writing verses on cats that speak: lives
By the prolonged accident of divine proof,
A living martyr to the biological.
Hell spreads its horrors on his window blind
And fills his room with interrogatives.

St. Thomas doubting and not doubting,
Confident of God, but dubious of human,
I render my tongue as merely minor flame
To glorify this inglorious martyrdom:
And when the bomb or angel breaks the vaulting
Trust he remembers, among the others, my name.

CLIFFORD DYMENT

The Crowd

Watching their faces for a badge, these girls
Whose lips are lit with red, these men
Whose close-shaved features fade
Into anonymous shade of bowler hat,
I find no ensign of a unique mover,
Brave personal device; I recognise
Air-tearing motor-horns, vague images
Reflected from shop-windows, and I know
This is a female street, for perfume lingers. . . .

(And the lips of quiet are closed.
The trees are brown and bent, now losing leaves.
This incised bench is old,
Its writing lost and dead.
Path-stones not individuals;
Equal white are the swans on the lake.)

Tango

Gliding the room
In a swoon of heat,
The luscious lava
Flowing from the band.

The lazy motion
And the strumming few guitars,
The perfumes rising
Thickly like smoke.

CLIFFORD DYMENT

There is guilt in the drums,
And fear in tinsel joy;
Like an oiled veneer
I slide off gaiety.

A window lets in night
And our laughter escapes:
Crowding the space are stars
Bright with hate.

Agony of Wood

Roots from the earth wrenched
Leave a cavity that groans;
That bleeds its woe of loss
Into stricken emptiness.
The poisoned knots of grief
Are active in the holes
Gasping from parted roots
And aching cords contract.
No longer will the wind
Fight earth for tree's possession
Till earth with victor's pleasure
Hugs tree with its soil's pressure.
Not till agony of wood
Can the earth be understood.

CLIFFORD DYMENT

Final Decision

Final decision's made.
We cannot turn our feet
To point to a retreat:
We've charted our own fate.

Wrecked fences, ditches wide
With stagnant waste, the sun's
Hot anger, storm's black guns
Convince us of no sins.

Our inspiration is
The arrow's singing line;
Our hearts carry its sign,
Acute, the truth alone.

Forward the journey to
Invisible and mute
Last universal root
Where sky and meadow mate.

The Temple

Luke tells us how Jesus
Was missed on the return to Galilee:
He had tarried in the Temple, zealous to learn
What his Father's will was to be.

I think of this page in Luke now.
I have left the soldiery to march ahead
And I lie here, the hawthorn budding,
The celandines like stars about my head.

CLIFFORD DYMENT

This morning I surprised a stoat
Feasting on the blood of a hare;
And now, all around me, the wedding songs of birds
Blossom in the air.

I ponder: some million years ago
Forests and crying fearful beasts perished
When a sea shuddered and threw up a mountain
To make this hill on which I rest.

Must death create? I speak
My question in this Temple under the sky—
But no answer comes from stoat or bird or hill
Whether it is man's Cross to kill, or die.

DAVID GASCOYNE

Light of the sun over arctic regions

Light of the sun over arctic regions
Presides, striking the sides of ice-bergs
With slanting oblique rays, setting
The opaque snow translucently aglow,
Illumining blocks sedate in indigo depths.

There the unending fields of frost are blown
Upon by the harsh desolate blast;
The sun lacks warmth; alone at last
With wind from beyond, night from above and below,
Snow's light is negative, white equals black.

On the heart's bitter winter shines love's face.
Breaking, a berg groans response;
A facet's radiance, a moment's melting
Are answer. Soon gone is the sun.
The frigid heart feels death's wind only.

Spring Mcmxl

London Bridge is falling down, Rome's burnt and Babylon
The Great is now but dust; yet still Spring must
Swing back through Time's continual arc to earth.
Though every land become as a black field
Dunged with the dead, drenched by the dyings' blood,
Still must a punctual goddess waken and ascend
The rocky stairs, up into earth's chilled air,
And pass upon her mission through those carrion ranks,

DAVID GASCOYNE

Picking her way among a maze of broken brick
To quicken with her footsteps the short sooty grass between;
While now once more their futile matchwood empires flare and
 blaze
And through the smoke men gaze with bloodshot eyes
At the translucent apparition, clad in trembling nascent green,
Of one they still can recognise, though scarcely understand.

A Sudden Squall

After some days of heat
Withering leaf and bloom,
Like pebbles falls the hail
Like chips of stone the sleet
Out of the sudden gloom
Across the peaceful vale
Just now so bright.

While we are waiting for
The sulky storm to stop
Hour after hour,
Watching the garden lake
Toss the toy ship,
The orchard fast grows dark
And bruised fruits drop.

Birds are all flown;
Rabbits in holes
Wait for the sun's return;
At sea great whales
Send up their fountains
As they drive taciturn
Through waves like mountains.

DAVID GASCOYNE

Green becomes sodden grey
And across the fields
At death of day
Mist draws its chilly sheets,
And darkness wields
Its eerie power, night's
Creatures begin to cry

This weather's change is blind.
His hopes grow dimmer
Who thought that summer
Would never end;
Would have good reason
To change his mind
For a rainy season.

A Wartime Dawn

Dulled by the slow glare of the yellow bulb;
As far from sleep still as at any hour
Since distant midnight; with a hollow skull
In which white vapours seem to reel
Among limp muddles of old thought; till eyes
Collapse into themselves like clams in mud. . . .
Hand paws the wall to reach the chilly switch;
Then nerve-shot darkness gradually shakes
Throughout the room. *Lie still.* . . . Limbs twitch;
Relapse to immobility's faint ache. And time
A while relaxes; space turns wholly black.

DAVID GASCOYNE

But deep in the velvet crater of the ear
A chirp of sound abruptly irritates.
A second, a third chirp; and then another far
Emphatic trill and chirrup shrills in answer; notes
From all directions round pluck at the strings
Of hearing, with frail finely-sharpened claws.
And in an instant, every wakened bird
Across surrounding miles of air
Outside, is sowing like a scintillating sand
Its throat's incessantly replenished store
Of tuneless singsong, timeless, aimless, blind.

Draw now with prickling hand the curtains back;
Unpin the blackout-cloth; let in
Grim crack-of-dawn's first glimmer through the glass.
All's yet half-sunk in Yesterday's stale death,
Obscurely still beneath a moist-tinged blank
Sky like the inside of a deaf-mute's mouth. . . .
Nearest within the window's sight, ash-pale
Against a cinder-coloured wall, the white
Pear-blossom hovers like a stare; rain-wet
The further house-tops weakly shine; and there
Beyond, hangs flaccidly a lone barrage-balloon.

An incommunicable desolation weighs
Like depths of stagnant water on this break of day.—
Long meditation without thought.—Until a breeze
From some pure Nowhere straying, stirs
A pang of poignant odour from the earth, an unheard sigh
Pregnant with sap's sweet tang and raw soil's fine
Aroma, smell of stone, and acrid breath
Of gravel puddles. While the brooding green
Of nearby gardens' grass and trees, the quiet flat
Blue leaves, the distant lilac mirages, are made
Clear by increasing daylight, and intensified.

DAVID GASCOYNE

Now head sinks into pillows in retreat
Before this morning's hovering advance;
(Behind loose lids, in sleep's warm porch, half hears
White hollow clink of bottles,—dragging crunch
Of milk-cart wheels,—and presently a snatch
Of windy whistling as the newsboy's bike winds near,
Distributing to neighbours' peaceful steps
Reports of last night's battles;) at last sleeps.
While early guns on Norway's bitter coast
Where faceless troops are landing, renew fire:
And one more day of War starts everywhere.

April 1940.

LAURENCE WHISTLER

Fear at the Manor

Tuck me in, my darling Mother,
Tuck me in and all about,
I heard the Robber to-night laughing,
Nick in the Chimney laughing out.

I'll tuck you in, my little poppit,
I'll tuck you in and snugly too,
And then old Nick in the hall chimney
Shall never come to bother you.

Leave the door, my darling Mother,
Leave the door a little ajar,
Sometimes thinking makes me frightened
So many curious sounds there are.

I'll leave the door, my pretty robin,
I'll leave the door a good foot wide.
It's only the sea-wind at the windows
Or when the cock swings round outside.

Stay with me, my darling Mother,
Stay with me a little, for I,
I'm frightened when I think of dying,
Why were we made if we must die?

I'll stay with you, my own heart's treasure,
I'll climb your narrow bed into,
I'll hug you to my own warm body—
How should I know that more than you?

LAURENCE WHISTLER

She stayed till he had lost all troubles,
And listened to his breathing low.
The doors shook, and a mouse laboured,
That storm four hundred years ago.

Four hundred years of changing Europe,
And grey lights on a grey house.
They have not made that changeless question
Any the easier for us.

It Will Not Last

It will not last, love will again be free:
There will be one who watches from this hill,
With rich contentment in his eyes, the grey
Flow of eternal afternoon one way,
The valley bindweed in his fingers still.

There will be one who from a drawer will take
Labour and hearts-ease for the growing nights:
There will be one who kneels at hide-and-seek
Beneath the yews, too overcome to speak:
There will be lovers putting out the lights.

All will be selfish, weaving as did we,
The world they wish, the bright or dim cocoon,
The daring or the cosy ecstasy.
Sick heart, take comfort then; for there will be
All that there was: good days, though not our own.

For what's the difference, if those eyes that watch—
That hand that threads the needle by the flame—
Those hands that grope towards the flame and touch—
Are but the dream of wombs? They will be rich.
We were: they will be. It will be the same.

REX WARNER

Mallard

Squawking they rise from reeds into the sun,
climbing like furies, running on blood and bone,
with wings like garden shears clipping the misty air,
four mallard, hard winged, with necks like rods
fly in perfect formation over the marsh.

Keeping their distance, gyring, not letting slip the air,
but leaping into it straight like hounds or divers,
they stretch out into the wind and sound their horns again.

Suddenly siding to a bank of air unbidden
by hand signal or morse message of command
downsky they plane, sliding like corks on a current,
designed so deftly that all air is advantage,

till, with few flaps, orderly as they left earth,
alighting among curlew they pad on mud.

Nile Fishermen

Naked men, fishing in Nile without a licence,
kneedeep in it, pulling gaunt at stretched ropes.
Round the next bend is the police boat and the officials
ready to make an arrest on the yellow sand.

The splendid bodies are stark to the swimming sand,
taut to the ruffled water, the flickering palms,
yet swelling and quivering as they tug at the trembling ropes.
Their faces are bent along the arms and still.

REX WARNER

Sun is torn in coloured petals on the water,
the water shivering in the heat and the north wind;
and near and far billow out white swollen crescents,
the clipping wings of feluccas, seagull sails.

A plunge in the turbid water, a quick joke stirs
a flashing of teeth, an invocation of God.
Here is food to be fetched and living from labour.
The tight ropes strain and the glittering backs for the haul.

Round the bend comes the police boat. The men scatter.
The officials blow their whistles on the golden sand.
They overtake and arrest strong bodies of men
who follow with sullen faces, and leave their nets behind.

Storm and War

Tears leaf-meal the hair of trees, raging in the wood,
whipping at trunks, tossing askew the desperate branches,
twirling the twigs and straining in whirl and hurry of rain,
flurrying flat smoke, driving, the autumnal wind.

Tall in the valleys pass in procession the faceless ghosts,
high grey wraiths of the rain in the impulsive blast
bleeding and separating, passing stately like a pomp of dreams,
pacing the dying earth, and melting from the angry air.

And I think of the whine and whirl and whistle of steel,
walls falling, the toppling of towers, disappearance of homes,
some with outflung arms, some like sticks
followed and hurried and flailed and hurled away by war.

Like weed or wand, paper, peel, or precious glove,
so are bully, hero, saint or simpleton in the storm
indifferently rolled—only from the huge ghosts
of those who understood how heavy fall the drenching tears.

REX WARNER

Chough

Desolate that cry as though world were unworthy.
See now, rounding the headland, a forlorn hopeless bird,
trembling black wings fingering the blowy air,
dainty and ghostly, careless of the scattering salt.

This is the cave-dweller that flies like a butterfly,
buffeted by daws, almost extinct, who has chosen,
so gentle a bird, to live on furious coasts.

Here where sea whistles in funnels, and slaps the back
of burly granite slabs, and hisses over holes,
in bellowing hollows that shelter the female seal
the Cornish chough wavers over the waves.

By lion rocks, rocks like the heads of queens,
sailing with ragged plumes upturned, into the wind
goes delicate indifferent the doomed bird.

Future

I see the houses of the future, and men upstanding,
men not fearing the sack.
Women work with men and love is voluntary,
love is delightful.

Hate is no more against those who withhold bread;
those people have gone.
Love is no more the antidote for terror,
but is recreation.

What is happening will be clear to the men of the future;
for deceit will not be needed.
But our here and now to them will look like a dream
sad, furious, fatal.

LOUIS MACNEICE

Sunday Morning

Down the road someone is practising scales,
The notes like little fishes vanish with a wink of tails,
Man's heart expands to tinker with his car
For this is Sunday morning, Fate's great bazaar,
Regard these means as ends, concentrate on this Now,
And you may grow to music or drive beyond Hindhead anyhow,
Take corners on two wheels until you go so fast
That you can clutch a fringe or two of the windy past,
That you can abstract this day and make it to the week of time
A small eternity, a sonnet self-contained in rhyme.

But listen, up the road, something gulps, the church spire
Opens its eight bells out, skulls' mouths which will not tire
To tell how there is no music or movement which secures
Escape from the weekday time. Which deadens and endures.

Leaving Barra

The dazzle on the sea, my darling,
Leads from the western channel
A carpet of brilliance taking
My leave for ever of the island.

I never shall visit that island
Again with its easy tempo—
The seal sunbathing, the circuit
Of gulls on the wing for garbage.

LOUIS MACNEICE

I go to a different garbage
And scuffle for scraps of notice,
Pretend to ignore the stigma
That stains my life and my leisure.

For fretful even in leisure
I fidget for different values,
Restless as a gull and haunted
By a hankering after Atlantis.

I do not know that Atlantis
Unseen and uncomprehended,
Dimly divined but keenly
Felt with a phantom hunger.

If only I could crush the hunger
If only I could lay the phantom
Then I should no doubt be happy
Like a fool or a dog or a buddha.

O the self-abnegation of Buddha
The belief that is disbelieving
The denial of chiaroscuro
Not giving a damn for existence!

But I would cherish existence
Loving the beast and the bubble
Loving the rain and the rainbow,
Considering philosophy alien.

For all the religions are alien
That allege that life is a fiction,
And when we agree in denial
The cock crows in the morning.

LOUIS MACNEICE

If only I could wake in the morning
And find I had learned the solution,
Wake with the knack of knowledge
Who as yet have only an inkling.

Though some facts foster the inkling—
The beauty of the moon and music,
The routine courage of the worker,
The gay endurance of women,

And you who to me among women
Stand for so much that I wish for,
I thank you, my dear, for the example
Of living like a fugue and moving.

For few are able to keep moving,
They drag and flag in the traffic;
While you are alive beyond question
Like the dazzle on the sea, my darling.

Autumn Journal

VII

Conferences, adjournments, ultimatums,
Flights in the air, castles in the air,
The autopsy of treaties, dynamite under the bridges,
The end of *laissez-faire*.
After the warm days the rain comes pimpling
The paving-stones with white
And with the rain the national conscience, creeping,
Seeping through the night.
And in the sodden park on Sunday protest
Meetings assemble not, as so often, now

LOUIS MACNEICE

Merely to advertise some patent panacea
But simply to avow
The need to hold the ditch; a bare avowal
That may perhaps imply
Death at the doors in a week but perhaps in the long run
Exposure of the lie.
Think of a number, double it, treble it, square it,
And sponge it out
And repeat *ad lib.* and mark the slate with crosses;
There is no time to doubt
If the puzzle really has an answer. Hitler yells on the wireless,
The night is damp and still
And I hear dull blows on wood outside my window;
They are cutting down the trees on Primrose Hill.
The wood is white like the roast flesh of chicken,
Each tree falling like a closing fan;
No more looking at the view from seats beneath the branches,
Everything is going to plan;
They want the crest of this hill for anti-aircraft,
The guns will take the view
And searchlights probe the heavens for bacilli
With narrow wands of blue.
And the rain came on as I watched the territorials
Sawing and chopping and pulling on ropes like a team,
In a village tug-of-war; and I found my dog had vanished
And thought 'This is the end of the old régime',
But found the police had got her at St. John's Wood station
And fetched her in the rain and went for a cup
Of coffee to an all-night shelter and heard a taxi-driver
Say 'It turns me up
When I see these soldiers in lorries'—rumble of tumbrils
Drums in the trees
Breaking the eardrums of the ravished dryads—
It turns me up; a coffee, please.

LOUIS MACNEICE

And as I go out I see a windscreen-wiper
In an empty car
Wiping away like mad and I feel astounded
That things have gone so far.
And I come back here to my flat and wonder whether
From now on I need take
The trouble to go out choosing stuff for curtains
As I don't know anyone to make
Curtains quickly. Rather one should quickly
Stop the cracks for gas or dig a trench
And take one's paltry measures against the coming
Of the unknown Uebermensch.
But one—meaning I—is bored, am bored, the issue
Involving principle but bound in fact
To squander principle in panic and self-deception—
Accessories after the act,
So that all we foresee is rivers in spate sprouting
With drowning hands
And men like dead frogs floating till the rivers
Lose themselves in the sands.
And we who have been brought up to think 'Gallant Belgium'
As so much blague
Are now preparing again to essay good through evil
For the sake of Prague;
And must, we suppose, become uncritical, vindictive,
And must, in order to beat
The enemy, model ourselves upon the enemy,
A howling radio for our paraclete.
The night continues wet, the axe keeps falling,
The hill grows bald and bleak,
No longer one of the sights of London but maybe
We shall have fireworks here by this day week.

The Creditor

The quietude of a soft wind
Will not rescind
My debts to God, but gentle-skinned
His finger probes. I lull myself
In quiet in diet in riot in dreams,
In dopes in drams in drums in dreams
Till God retire and the door shut.
But
Now I am left in the fire-blaze
The peacefulness of the fire-blaze
Will not erase
My debts to God for his mind strays
Over and under and all ways
All days and always.

An Epilogue (for W. H. Auden)

Now the winter nights begin
Lonely comfort walls me in;
So before the memory slip
I review our Iceland trip.

Not for me romantic nor
Idyll on a mythic shore
But a fancy turn, you know,
Sandwiched in a graver show.

Down in Europe Seville fell,
Nations germinating hell;
The Olympic games were run—
Spots upon the Aryan sun.

LOUIS MACNEICE

And the don in me set forth
How the landscape of the north
Had educed the saga style
Plodding forward mile by mile.

And the don in you replied
That the North begins inside,
Our ascetic guts require
Breathers from the latin fire.

So although no ghost was scotched
We were happy while we watched
Ravens from their walls of shale
Cruise around the rotting whale,

Watched the sulphur basons boil,
Loops of steam uncoil and coil,
While the valley fades away
To a sketch of Judgment Day.

So we rode and joked and smoked
With no miracles evoked,
With no levitations won
In the thin unreal sun;

In that island never found
Visions blossom from the ground,
No conversions like St. Paul,
No great happenings at all.

Holidays should be like this,
Free from over-emphasis,
Time for soul to stretch and spit
Before the world comes back on it,

LOUIS MACNEICE

Before the chimneys row on row
Sneer in smoke 'We told you so'
And the fog-bound sirens call
Ruin to the long sea-wall.

Rows of books around me stand,
Fence me round on either hand;
Through that forest of dead words
I would hunt the living birds—

Great black birds that fly alone
Slowly through a land of stone.
And the gulls who weave a free
Quilt of rhythm on the sea.

Here in Hampstead I sit late
Nights which no-one shares and wait
For the 'phone to ring or for
Unknown angels at the door;

Better were the northern skies
Than this desert in disguise—
Rugs and cushions and the long
Mirror which repeats the song.

For the litany of doubt
From these walls comes breathing out
Till the room becomes a pit
Humming with the fear of it—

With the fear of loneliness
And uncommunicableness;
All the wires are cut, my friends
Live beyond the severed ends. .

LOUIS MACNEICE

So I write these lines for you
Who have felt the death-wish too,
But your lust for life prevails—
Drinking coffee, telling tales.

Our prerogatives as men
Will be cancelled who knows when;
Still I drink your health before
The gun-butt raps upon the door.

Entirely

If we could get the hang of it entirely
It would take too long;
All we know is the splash of words in passing
And falling twigs of song,
And when we try to eavesdrop on the great
Presences it is rarely
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate
Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely
In somebody else's arms
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's
Yammering fire alarms
But, as it is, the spears each year go through
Our flesh and almost hourly
Bell or siren banishes the blue
Eyes of Love entirely.

LOUIS MACNEICE

And if the world were black or white **entirely**
And all the charts were plain
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,
A prism of delight and pain,
We might be surer where we wished to go
Or again we might be merely
Bored but in brute reality there is no
Road that is right entirely.

March 1940.

The Gardener

He was not able to read or write,
He did odd jobs on gentlemen's places
Cutting the hedge or hoeing the drive
With the smile of a saint,
With the pride of a feudal chief,
For he was not quite all there.

Crippled by rheumatism
By the time his hair was white,
He would reach the garden by twelve
His legs in soiled puttees,
A clay pipe in his teeth,
A tiny flag in his cap
A white cat behind him,
And his eyes a cornflower blue.

And between the clack of the shears
Or the honing of the scythe
Or the rattle of the rake on the gravel
He would talk to amuse the children,
He would talk to himself or the cat
Or the robin waiting for worms

LOUIS MACNEICE

Perched on the handle of the spade;
Would remember snatches of verse
From the elementary school
About a bee and a wasp
Or the cat by the barndoor spinning;
And would talk about himself for ever—
You would never find his like—
Always in the third person;
And would level his stick like a gun
(With a glint in his eye)
Saying 'Now I'm a Frenchman'—
He was not quite right in the head.

He believed in God—
The Good Fellow Up There—
And he used a simile of Homer
Watching the falling leaves,
And every year he waited for the Twelfth of July,
Cherishing his sash and his fife
For the carnival of banners and drums.
He was always claiming but never
Obtaining his old-age pension,
For he did not know his age.
And his rheumatism at last
Kept him out of the processions.
And he came to work in the garden
Later and later in the day,
Leaving later at night;
In the damp dark of the night
At ten o'clock or later
You could hear him mowing the lawn,
The mower moving forward
And backward, forward and backward
For he mowed while standing still;
He was not quite up to the job.

LOUIS MACNEICE'

But he took a pride in the job,
He kept a bowl of cold
Tea in the crotch of a tree,
Always enjoyed his food
And enjoying honing the scythe
And making the potato drills
And putting the peasticks in;
And enjoyed the noise of the corncrake,
And the early hawthorn hedge
Peppered black and green,
And the cut grass dancing in the air—
Happy as the day was long.

Till his last sickness took him
And he could not leave his home
And his eyes lost their colour
And he sat by the little range
With a finch in a cage and a framed
Certificate of admission
Into the Orange Order,
And his speech began to wander
And memory ebbed
Leaving upon the shore
Odd shells and heads of wrack
And his soul went out on the ebbing
Tide in a trim boat
To find the Walls of Derry
Or the land of the Ever Young.

Summer 1939

LOUIS MACNEICE

Bar-Room Matins

Popcorn peanuts clams and gum:
We whose Kingdom has not come
Have mouths like men but still are dumb

Who only deal with Here and Now
As circumstances may allow:
The sponsored programme tells us how.

And yet the preachers tell the pews
What man misuses God can use:
Give us this day our daily news

That we may hear behind the brain
And through the sullen heat's migraine
The atavistic voice of Cain:

'Who entitled you to spy
From your easy heaven? Am I
My brother's keeper? Let him die.'

And God in words we soon forget
Answers through the radio set:
'The curse is on his forehead yet.'

Mass destruction, mass disease:
We thank thee, Lord, upon our knees
That we were born in times like these

When with doom tumbling from the sky
Each of us has an alibi
For doing nothing—Let him die.

LOUIS MACNEICE

Let him die, his death will be
A drop of water in the sea,
A journalist's commodity.

Pretzels crackers chips and beer:
Death is something that we fear
But it titillates the ear.

Anchovy almond ice and gin:
All shall die though none can win;
Let the Untergang begin—

Die the soldiers, die the Jews,
And all the breadless homeless queues.
Give us this day our daily news.

July 1940

Spring Voices

The small householder now comes out warily
Afraid of the barrage of sun that shouts cheerily,
Spring is massing forces, birds wink in air,
The battlemented chestnuts volley green fire,
The pigeons banking on the wind, the hoots of cars,
Stir him to run wild, gamble on horses, buy cigars;
Joy lies before him to be ladled and lapped from his hand—
Only that behind him, in the shade of his villa, memories stand
Breathing on his neck and muttering that all this has happened
before,
Keep the wind out, cast no clout, try no unwarranted jaunts
untried before,
But let the spring slide by nor think to board its car
For it rides West to where the tangles of scrap-iron are;

LOUIS MACNEICE

Do not walk, these voices say, between the bucking clouds alone
Or you may loiter into a suddenly howling crater, or fall, jerked
back, garrotted by the sun.

Extract from 'Out of the Picture'

(*The LISTENER-IN is speaking*):

Ladies and gentlemen,
My talk this evening is entitled 'Summer is A-Comen In'.
You needn't listen if you don't want to.
Summer is a-Comen in. Soon we must change the clocks,
Give up our coal fire, fill the grate with lilac,
Mow the lawn and clip the hawthorn hedge,
Take longer spins in the car,
Stud the radiator with wasps and flies,
And smell the good new tar upon the road,
Plant out the geraniums from the potting shed,
Take part in the office sweepstake on the Derby,
Buy a new panama, read about the County Cricket
But never watch it—it takes up too much time—
Read about Wimbledon, Henley and Ascot.
Read the advertisements for seaside lodgings,
Bungalows to let and Mediterranean cruises,
This is the type of the English summer.
But will this summer run true to type?
The official announcers would never mention them
But there are certain factors to be considered.
First, there is a war about to be declared.
Second—but who cares about the second?
Summer is a-Comen in. If there is war,
What sort of summer will it be?
Will there be any green grass left at Lord's?
Will there be any horses to run at Ascot?

LOUIS MACNEICE

Will there be any brass bands to meet the returning heroes
Supposing any return?

When the heroes came back from the ten years' war
(But no war now will last ten years)

They struck a port they seemed to have seen before.

There were old men sitting on the bollards

Puffing smoke across the sea,

There were dead men hanging in the gantries,

There was a lame bird limping on the quay.

When were we here before? one of them said.

The captain answered: This is where we were born

And where we have now returned. Dead to the Dead.

Summer is a-Comen in. A packet of sunflower seed

To plant along the wall. A packet of Sweet William.

What else, my dear? The children like it, you know,

To have some flowers of their own.

They like a little garden to look after—

(Echo off: After, after—)

And what comes after that?

Flowers in the sky, rockets and flares.

Things are not what they were, the time is past

For growing in a quiet plot,

For sleeping in an easy bed.

CHARLES MADGE

Fortune

The natural silence of a tree
The motion of a mast upon the fresh-tossing sea
Now foam-inclined, now to the sun with dignity

Or the stone brow of a mountain
Regarded from a town, or the curvet fountain
Or one street-stopped in wonder at the fountain

Or a great cloud entering the room of the sky
Napoleon of his century
Heard come to knowing music consciously

Such, not us, reflect and have their day
We are but vapour of today
Unless love's chance fall on us and call us away

As the wind takes what it can
And blowing on the fortunate face, reveals the man.

In the Woods

Thereat Erminia from the shady plant
Of the old wood emerging on her horse
No more controlled the rein with trembling hand
Being as it were half dead and half alive.
Fleeing away all night and all the day
Wandering without counsel, without guide,

CHARLES MADGE

She came to beautiful Jordan, the clear water,
And lay down on the bank above the stream.
But sleep, which of the mortal miseries
Is soft forgetting and composing quiet,
O'er-covered with placidity and pleasure
Like wings her senses and their inward pain.
Not so more heard she garrulous the birds
Nor felt them happily salute the dawn
Amid the languid light. . . .
But then, into her grief, as she lamented
There rose the clear sound of some people coming
Which seemed to be of accent pastoral
Mixed with the peasant language of the woods.
She rose and went that way with paces slow
And saw a man who sang among the shades
A tender song beside the listening herds,
And followed by three children as he sang.
These when they saw her suddenly appear
With unexpected armour, stood aside.
But then salutes Erminia and softly
Unveiled her eyes and hair of glittering gold.
Follow, said they, gentle adventurous lady.

January 1936

Blocking the Pass

With an effort Grant swung the great block,
The swivel operated and five or six men
Crouched under the lee of the straight rock.

They waited in silence or counting ten,
They thrust their fingers in their wet hair,
The steel sweated in their hands. And then

CHARLES MADGE

The clouds hurried across a sky quite bare,
The sounds of the station, three miles off, ceased,
The dusty birds hopped keeping watch. And there

Arose to what seemed as high as the sky at least,
Arose a giant and began to die,
Arose such a shape as the night in the East.

The stones sobbed, the trees gave a cry,
A tremulous wonder shook animal and plant,
And a decapitating anger stirred the sky

And 'alone, on a tall stone, stood Grant.

A Nightly Deed

Sir, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart I know not how
I can go no longer.

Spectres rise on every side,
Spectres of the Brocken,
With their bony arms out wide
I can see them mocking.

Empty as an old tin can
Is each horrid phantom,
Neither ghost they are nor man.
I can't understand 'em.

CHARLES MADGE

If Napoleon's in his grave
And Bruin in the mountain;
This must be the ocean wave
Roaring in the fountain.

Eyes no eyes but drops of lead
Pennies and a farthing,
There is nothing to be said,
But the poor man starving.

See his cold and empty grate,
See his little cottage,
See his cold and empty plate,
He has got no pottage.

Sir, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows cruel,
Let us go, I know not how,
And fetch him winter fuel.

HERBERT READ

The Refugees

Mute figures with bowed heads
They travel along the road:
Old women, incredibly old,
And a hand-cart of chattels.

They do not weep:
Their eyes are too raw for tears.

Past them have hastened
Processions of retreating gunteams,
Baggage-wagons and swift horsemen.
Now they struggle along
With the rearguard of a broken army.

We will hold the enemy towards nightfall
And they will move
Mutely into the dark behind us,
Only the creaking cart
Disturbing their sorrowful serenity.

Inbetweentimes

Between the Winter and the Spring
between day and night
a no man's time a mean light
with cold mist creeping along the alleys
and the sun like a world withdrawn.

HERBERT READ

The shrill voices of surplus children
shake up the frosty dust
lamps are lit
and bleak shadows like bruises
rise under their golden eyes.

Through these cavernous streets
between a winter and a spring
between night and day
we wander our hearts lifted
above the shadows and the dust
secure in an alien light.

A Northern Legion

Bugle calls coiling through the rocky valley
have found echoes in the eagles' cries:
an outrage is done on anguished men
now men die and death is no deedful glory.

Eleven days this legion forced the ruined fields, the
burnt homesteads and empty garths, the broken arches
of bridges: desolation moving like a shadow before them, a
rain of ashes. Endless their anxiety

marching into a northern darkness: approaching
a narrow defile, the waters falling fearfully
the clotting menace of shadows and all the multiple
instruments of death in ambush against them.

The last of the vanguard sounds his doleful note.
The legion now is lost. None will follow.

HERBERT READ

To a Conscript of 1940

'Qui n'a pas une fois désespéré de l'honneur, ne sera jamais un héros.'—GEORGES BERNANOS.

A soldier passed me in the freshly-fallen snow,
His footsteps muffled, his face unearthly grey;
And my heart gave a sudden leap
As I gazed on a ghost of five-and-twenty years ago.

I shouted Halt! and my voice had the old accustomed ring
And he obeyed it as it was obeyed
In the shrouded days when I too was one
Of an army of young men marching

Into the unknown. He turned towards me and I said:
'I am one of those who went before you
Five-and-twenty years ago: one of the many who never returned,
Of the many who returned and yet were dead.

We went where you are going, into the rain and the mud;
We fought as you will fight
With death and darkness and despair;
We gave what you will give—our brains and our blood.

We think we gave in vain. The world was not renewed.
There was hope in the homestead and anger in the streets
But the old world was restored and we returned
To the dreary field and workshop, and the immemorial feud

Of rich and poor. Our victory was our defeat.
Power was retained where power had been misused
And youth was left to sweep away
The ashes that the fires had strewn beneath our feet.

HERBERT READ

But one thing we learned: there is no glory in the deed
Until the soldier wears a badge of tarnished braid;
There are heroes who have heard the rally and have seen
The glitter of a garland round their head.

Theirs is the hollow victory. They are deceived.
But you, my brother and my ghost, if you can go
Knowing that there is no reward, no certain use
In all your sacrifice, then honour is reprieved.

To fight without hope is to fight with grace,
The self reconstructed, the false heart repaired.'
Then I turned with a smile, and he answered my salute
As he stood against the fretted hedge, which was like white
lace.

A Song for the Spanish Anarchists

The golden lemon is not made
but grows on a green tree:
A strong man and his crystal eyes
is a man born free.

The oxen pass under the yoke
and the blind are led at will:
But a man born free has a path of his own
and a house on the hill.

And men are men who till the land
and women are women who weave:
Fifty men own the lemon grove
and no man is a slave.

HERBERT READ

Summer Rain

Against the window pane
against the temple of my brain
beat the muffled taps of rain.

Upon the scorched and mottled leaves
upon the blenched and pented sheaves
the land receives

the liquid flood:
water like a blush of blood
returns to the parched rood.

The fox has left his fetid hovel
to lick the drenched blades of sorrel;
odours rise from thyme and fennel.

The worm in his retreat deep under
the earth's insipid crust
hearing a distant drumming thunder

blindly renews his upward undulation.
The soil respires as if in emulation
of living things. All elements their maculation

desire and achieve. A warm breath
issues from the nostrils beneath
the mask of death.

CHRISTOPHER HASSALL

Crisis

NO. III

We stood among the chimneys hand in hand,
Goose-fleshed in rugs, watching the sky go mad.
The grown-ups wept, the children brought from bed
Saw monstrous poppies open on the wind
To drop blue pollen. Someone near the cosy
Cocoon housing my six-year littleness
Whispered 'These rockets at the Armistice
Are the last spasms of an age gone crazy';
Then touched my shoulder, adding 'He at least
Was born too late to know a world debased,
Stript of all kindness, loveliness, and logic.'
—And it was twenty years before that boy
Thought of those words again, to find how they
Spoken in joy, were destined to be tragic.

NO. XXII

At night, and in the pauses of the day,
By traffic blocks, or where existence runs
Down indoor channels, a vibration stuns
The sense. When there are no more words to say,
Nothing to hear but thoughts like mice at play,
My ears (the undiscoverable ones)
Pick up impatient grouches from the guns
Where they lie stored, waiting our nerves away.
I hear their silence like a tight-lipped threat,
Or pother on a stage before the show,
While anxious authors in the Cabinet
Allot the parts, get busy on the set,

CHRISTOPHER HASSALL

Revise the script, reject a page or so,
And tell their steel-boned actors where to go.

NO. XXVII

Look at the searchlights! There's a fire in heaven,
And we have turned our hoses on the sky.
Look at that flock of birds, daring to fly
Across the luminous torrent, never driven
To earth, but coming thickly on in tens,
Twenties and hundreds, silvering overhead.
—Your dare-all birds are aeroplanes, I said,
Whose passengers are heavy fountain-pens.
—What will they write?

Death-warrants.

Who must die?

Since you demand an answer: You and I.
My friend grew pale. Is this our Judgement-Day?
How have we sinned? How have these Things intruded
On our sweet sleep? Who made them, anyway?
Startled, we both replied together—You Did.

WILLIAM PLOMER

Thoughts on the Japanese Invasion of China, 1938

Taut paper and clean wood enclose
A neat, sweet domestic place
Where slant sun and magic snows
Alter the shadow on a well-loved face.

Warm wine in a little cup,
A red leaf fell, a white sleeve fluttered,
Morning smoke was wafted up,
More, more was felt than uttered.

Why, then why the rape of a child,
The lidless eyes, the screaming man,
The ricefield village all defiled
To a cold, elaborate, zestful plan?

Because shy fingers end in claws,
Behind soft lips are teeth that bite,
And a vast uneasy longing roars
Up like a bomber through the night.

From the gods was stolen the seed of fire,
The Dragon flew in the face of the Sun—
One god is Hope, a hardened liar,
Another is Love, the unconquered one.

WILLIAM PLOMER

September Evening, 1938

As the golden grass burns out
In a cooling ash of dew
The lovers disembrace
And face the evening view.

The long plain down
Shaped like a thigh
Slopes towards the sea,
And away up in the sky

Too small to be heard
A plane like a silver spark
Bright in the sun's last rays
Drifts eastward into the dark;

A single stack of hay
In the valley at their feet
Like a primitive small church
Looks simple, strong and neat;

Inside a wattled fold
A flock of sheep
Stand, stir, or lie
Fleece against fleece asleep;

Lights in the bungalow,
A constant hum of cars;
Mallow flowers in the grass;
One or two stars.

With the fading day
All has grown clear:
That everything is vital
And infinitely dear.

WILLIAM PLOMER

Looking round, the girl thinks
'How precious to me
My home and my work and each thing
I can touch and can see,

George's navy-blue suit,
And my white linen dress,
And the way that his eyebrows grow—
This is my happiness!

And he, clasping her hand,
More grave than before,
Says, 'Yes, I will fight
(If there is to be a war)

For all that has gone to make
Us, and this day.'
Then arm in arm along the path
Silent they saunter away.

A Traveller's Tale

'... des horizons défaits qui se refont plus loin.'

We came that way by choice,
Preferred
Desert and altitude.
That was the way we chose,
We should choose it again.

We should come that way again.
Though not the men we were.

WILLIAM PLOMER

Mountain fever has left us thin,
We still see snow, the wind
That drove the grit against the skin
Has left our faces scarred,
Our cheeks have fallen in,
Our foreheads wear the anxious lines
That acid doubt takes time to groove,
But why complain?

We are not without reward
For our senses were enriched
By the difficult and rare,
The rare and strange,
The little known, the chanced upon,
Moments worth waiting for
And slowly won by weeks of care,
Moments when hope
Fell open like a shell,
And showed the pearl,
And the pearl lay in the palm.
And why did we start out?
We were impelled
To choose the way we came.
And what have we to show but scars?
Nor for us to tell
Everything we know.

Sometimes in twos or threes,
But oftener one by one,
We made our way along
And met from time to time
Comparing notes and mapping routes.
We climbed for days towards the sky
But only came on dry plateaux
With various views

WILLIAM PLOMER

Of heights too huge to climb,
The massif, where a hooded storm
Darkens the peaks day in, day out,
But keeps the foothills green.

We cannot be too grateful
To the desert tribes,
The nomads who for shawls or beads
Helped us along,
But best of all we saw
Some pure-bred people of those parts,
Rare types, a race who act
Not for applause or momentary effect,
Who make the best of what they find
But most respect
What might exist.

All their native music comes
From instruments with just one string
Accompanied by drums,
We heard them sing
And saw them dance,
They only moved their heads and arms
But a nod of theirs means more
Than the march of crowds means here,

We heard the native names of towns
Sounding like stones let fall in pools
Or rocks rebounding between waterfalls
At daybreak into deep ravines,
But saw no towns.
Perhaps there are no towns,
Perhaps their towns
Are legends like their lives.

WILLIAM PLOMER

We know their eyes reflect
Perfections that outdo
What we conceive
At moments when the pearl
Lies perfect in the palm.

No, not the men we were
Before we came that way,
Anonymous and proud
We wear our scars with joy,
Yes, we who spent ourselves
To take a chosen way.

MICHAEL ROBERTS

They Will Come Back

They will come back, the quiet days,
Rosemary, myrtle, lavender,
And spring returning, leaf by leaf,
To the quiet heart, the single mind.

Not with the slow septennial change,
The steady pulse, or the iron tide;
With the curfew dove, the quiet bell,
It will not come, the harvest-home.

They will not come, the gentian days,
With the cornfield white in summer, or the long
Provençal noon, but with the autumnal storm,
Strikes in the north, and random shots.

They will come back, the strenuous days,
On Peteret Ridge, the Eagle Nest,
And cross the gap of trivial time
Sure as the wind, the night express.

Through bombs, and teargas, through the acute
Machine-gun rattling answer, strict
Self-knowledge, dark rebellion, death
In the shuttered streets, through barricades,
And doors flung open in the wind,
They will come back.

Gale Warning

The wind breaks bound, tossing the oak and chestnut
Whirling the paper at street corners,
The city clerks are harassed, wrestling head-down:
The gulls are blown inland.

Three slates fall from a roof,
The promenade is in danger:
Inland, the summer fête is postponed,
The British glider record broken.

The wind blows through the City, cleansing,
Whipping the posters from the hoardings,
Tearing the bunting and the banners,
The wind blows steadily, and as it will.

In Time of Peace

There is no quiet in the earth,
In the green root of history, or the leaf
Bending toward the earth;
In the brown eyes, the lake reflecting

Cumulus, cirrus, moving;
Or in the water-sky, reflecting channels in the ice-pack;
In boundless, never-ending action, under, and in, and over,
The sea reflecting,
There is no peace.

At Fleurier, in the shadow of the stone-pine,
At Langres, in the vineyard,
At Macugnaga,
There is no peace.

MICHAEL ROBERTS

Bruno, in the Campo di Fiori, burning,
Hitler saluting,
Jules, remembering the orchard and the dead,
Marcel, rolling a cigarette, and Guillaume,
Scanning the frontier ridges for deserters or a chamois;
These,

The building of a tower,
The meteor falling,
The shriek and shuddering of brakes,
The anguish in the windscreen, and the growth
Bursting, a secret flower; the newsboy shouting:
These are normal.

There is no quiet in the turning sea,
Or under burning stone, or glacier ice;
Under the guns, the summer corn, the Paramount,
Deeper than piercing worm or peering drill,
The blind earth cogitates, the lava moves:

There is no peace, there is no certainty,
There is no quiet but the solid earth: the times
—The stonefall and the clamouring and silence—
The times are normal.

H.M.S. Hero

Pale grey, her guns hooded, decks clear of all impediment,
Easily, between the swart tugs, she glides in the pale October
sunshine:
It is Saturday afternoon, and the men are at football,
The wharves and the cobbled streets are silent by the slow river.

MICHAEL ROBERTS

Smoothly, rounding the long bend, she glides to her place in
history,

Past the grimed windows cracked and broken,
Past Swan Hunter's, Hawthorn Leslie's, Armstrong's,
Down to the North Sea, and trials, and her first commission.

Here is grace; and a job well done; built only for one end.
Women watch from the narrow doorways and give no sign,
Children stop playing by the wall and stare in silence
At gulls wheeling above the Tyne, or the ship passing.

Defeat

It was not thus we fought, nor in this city,
With the car-lines and the houses twisted,
And the entrails of the factory smouldering:
It was not here.

These bodies are not ours, lying, defeated,
Strangled by the unknown air, the drifting fumes,
These tortured lips and flowers are not us:
Our words were light.

These conquerors are not ours, nor these our children,
Building new barricades in stranger towns;
Our city dies in us, and in our eyes,
And dies defeated.

The Green Lake

Eloquent are the hills: their power speaks
In ice, rock and falling stone;
The voices of croziered fern, wood-sorrel, gentian, edelweiss,
Lead upward to the summit or the high col.

MICHAEL ROBERTS

The mountain lake mirrors the hills, and the white clouds
Move in a blue depth, the hut stands empty:
No-one appears all day, nothing disturbs
The symphony of ice and yellow rock and the blue shadow.

And at dusk the familiar sequence: the light
Lingering on the peak; and near the horizon
Apricot-coloured skies, then purple; and the first stars;
An hour of bustle in the hut, and then silence.

Only at two in the morning men stir in the bunks,
Look out of the windows, put on their boots,
Exchange a word with the guardian, curse the cold,
And move with a force beyond their own to the high peaks,

Be still for once. Do not sing,
Let the blood beat its symphony unanswered;
Remain here by the lake for a whole day
With the sky clear and the rocks asking to be climbed.

There is music in movement, in the song, the dance,
The swing of the accordion in the crowded hut,
The swing of the axe in the icefall; but be still.
Listen. There is another voice that speaks.

In Our Time

Between the rough hills of gabbro and the cold sea,
Between the factory hooter and the snub-nosed bullet,
Folly grows up to its full height, but cannot grow for ever.

Folly is built on pride, on pride and power,
And power ends in weariness and duty:
Even the hooded eagle cannot soar to heaven.

MICHAEL ROBERTS

And the leader looks at last toward the people,
People asking for a home, a plot of earth,
A pageant in spring, and a sight of foreign merchants.

Power is built on fear and empty bellies:
Between the rough hills of gabbro and the cold sea
The gulls scream, squabbling for a poor harvest.

Between the factory hooter and the snub-nosed bullet,
Under the shadow of the guns, the corn ripens,
And folly cannot die, but cannot grow for ever.

EDITH SITWELL

Three Poor Witches

(For W. T. Walton)

Whirring, walking
On the tree-top,
Three poor witches
Mow and mop.
Three poor witches
Fly on switches
Of a broom,
From their cottage-room.
Like goat's beard rivers,
Black and lean,
Are Moll and Meg,
And Myrrhaline.
'Of those whirring witches, Meg'
(Bird-voiced fire screams)
'Has one leg;
Moll has two, on tree-tops see,
Goat-foot Myrrhaline has three!'
When she walks
Turned to a wreath
Is every hedge;
She walks beneath
Flowered trees like water
Splashing down;
Her rich and dark silk
Plumcake gown
Has folds so stiff
It stands alone

EDITH SITWELL

Within the fields
When she is gone.
And when she walks
Upon the ground
You'd never know
How she can bound
Upon the tree-tops, for she creeps
With a snail's slow silver pace;
Her milky silky wrinkled face
Shows no sign of her disgrace.
But walking on each
Leafy tree-top,—
Those old witches,
See them hop!
Across the blue-leaved
Mulberry tree
Of the rustling
Bunched sea,
To China, thick trees whence there floats
From wrens' and finches' feathered throats
Songs. The North Pole is a tree
With thickest chestnut flowers. . . . We see
Them whizz and turn
Through Lisbon, churn
The butter-pats to coins gold,
Sheep's milk to muslin, thin and cold.
Then one on one leg,
One on two,
One on three legs
Home they flew
To their cottage; there one sees
And hears no sound but wind in trees;
One candle spills out thick gold coins
Where quilted dark with tree shade joins.

EDITH SITWELL

The Mauve Summer Rain

The mauve summer rain
Is falling again—
It soaks through the eaves
And the ladies' sleeves—
It soaks through the leaves

That like silver fish fall
In the fountains, recall
Afternoons when I
Was a child small and shy
In the palace. . . . Fish lie

On the grass with lives darkling.
Our laughter falls sparkling
As the mauve raindrops bright
When they fall through the light
With the briefest delight.

The pavilions float
On the lake like a boat. . . .
Mauve rains from trees fall
Like wistaria flowers . . . all
My life is like this
And drifts into nothingness!

The strange ladies sigh
'The autumn is nigh' . . .
The King bows and mutters. . . .
His eyelids seem shutters
Of a palace pavilion
Deserted a million

Echoing years ago.
Oh, but the rain falls slow.

Tattered Serenade : Beggar to Shadow

To ROBERT HERRING

(‘Je m’en allais, les poings dans mes poches crevées;

Mon paletot aussi devenait idéal;

J’allais sous le ciel, Muse, et j’étais ton féal.

Oh là là, que d’amours splendides j’ai rêvées.’

ARTHUR RIMBAUD)

I

These are the nations of the Dead, their million-year-old
Rags about them,—these, the eternally cold,
Misery’s worlds, with Hunger, their long sun
Shut in by polar worlds of ice, known to no other,
Without a name, without a brother,
Though their skin shows that they yet are men,

Airing their skeletons’ well-planned cities where,
Left by the rose, the flesh, with truth alone,
The fevers of the world and of the heart,
The light of the sun, are gone.

And to their only friend, the Shade
They cast, their muttering voices sing this Serenade:

‘O Shade! Gigantic and adaptable Ape,
With the elegance of the skeleton
In your black tattered cape—
How like, and yet how unlike, you are to our last state!

You, too, have giant hands,—but have no thumbs
In a world where nothing is to make or hold,
Nor have you that appalling gulf the heart,—
Or that red gulf the gullet where only Hunger comes.
For face, you have a hollow wolf-grey cowl
Like mine . . . no voice to howl—

EDITH SITWELL

(O plain of winter wolves beneath my heart!)
And no identity! No face to weep!
No bed—unlike the rich men who can creep
Into the pocks made by that vast disease
That is our civilisation, once there, lie at ease!

No memory,—no years,
Nothing to feel or think,
No friend from whom to part with youthful tears.
But your unutterable tatters cannot stink!

My overcoat, like yours, is an Ideal,
With a gulf for pockets—nothing there to steal
But my empty hands, that long have lost their use,
With nothing now to make, or hold, or lose.

Yet when spring comes, a world is in my head,
And dreams, for those who never have a bed—

The thought of a day when all may be possible,—all
May come my way', said small Rag-Castle to Rag-Castle tall,—

The young, that have no covering between
Their outer tatters and the worthless skin
That shows the air, the rain, they yet are men,

When remembering it is spring, falls the warm rain
Like lilies of the vale,
Buds golden-pale
Sprouting from pavements, or a universe of coins, endless gold
Pelting the homeless, those who have no dress
Against the winter cold,
But the skeleton, that burgh of idleness
Where only the worm works . . . those that are alone
Except for hunger, thirst, and lust;
For the fevers of the world and of the heart,
The summer rose, are gone.

EDITH SITWELL

II

In the summer, when no-one is cold,
And the country roads seem of hot gold,
While the air seems a draught of white wine
Where all day long golden stars shine,—
And the sun is a world of red meat
For those who have nothing to eat,
I walk the world, envying the roads
That have somewhere to go, that bear loads
Of happiness, business, and sorrow,
And the rose that cares not for to-morrow;
But I've nothing to hold or to lose,
And my hands have long since lost their use;
While my overcoat's but an Ideal,—
In my pockets there's nothing to steal.
But the roads have north, east, west, and south,
For their food, though I've none for my mouth
Or my empty red gulf of a heart—
I have no friend from whom I must part
But the shade that I cast,—my one friend
Till at last the world comes to an end.
His face is a wolfish grey cowl
Like my own, but without the wolf's howl,
For, like me, he's a face, but no tears
He can shed, neither memory nor years.
But the Shadow has never known cold,
And the Shadow will never grow old,—

EDITH SITWELL

The black tatters he wears cannot *stink*
And he neither can feel, fear, nor *think*,

While a universe grows in my head,—
I have *dreams*, though I have not a *bed*—

The thought of a world and a day
When all may be possible, still come my way

As I walk the long roads of hot gold
In the summer, when no-one is cold.

Spring

Deep in the shade, the starved man's cloak through which the
cold wind comes,

The shade, the only comfort of the slums,
The lost men, little children of this world
Where only the spider pities them, weaves from its thread
Their blankets against the cold, and where for bread
They have the stones of the ruins, cry to Death:

'There is no more to take, but my last breath.

O Death, thou art an outcast, too, like me—

Thou knowest I have nothing left but thee:

My only friend, shun not such raggedness

As the grave knows, and thy own loneliness.

Thou hast known hunger too: come then and hold

Me fast, till I no more shall feel the world's long cold:

Once thou didst steal my mother's milk from me,

But now, grown famished too, I pity thee.'

Then with his universal smile, Death said,

'Outcast no more, for Man has made me God, dreaming that
God is dead.'

Yet once, in spring, men's hearts forgot that they are cold,
And shone like many suns,—the dust seemed old,

EDITH SITWELL

No more a king, and powerless to hold
Endurance, hope, the loved and youthful smile.
The fields forgot that huntsmen snare
For Man, his brother the small hare,
The lame and lonely Dark forgot
That hungered, it must snare and plot,—
In that green spring, when hearts were warm for a small fading
while. . . .

JOHN PUDNEY

Missing

Less said the better.
The bill unpaid, the dead letter,
No roses at the end
Of Smith, my friend.

Last words don't matter,
And there are none to flatter.
Words will not fill the post
Of Smith, the ghost.

For Smith, our brother,
Only son of loving mother,
The ocean lifted, stirred,
Leaving no word.

Epitaph

He soared against the yielding air,
He leant against the sky.
On earth the blossom froth of spring
Has scorched his inmost eye.
His teeth met in the summer fruit
And let the teeming waste
Of the abundant juices scald
His comprehending taste.
Now flesh which was as foliage,
Which was as fine and firm
As lustre of the holly leaf,

JOHN PUDNEY

Is gutted with the worm.
It was a worm of discontent
With sap and sun and blood,
A worm with inner sightless eyes
Crept to him from the mud,
A worm that never saw the sky
Nor praised the lark-loud air,
But conned his shapely skeleton
And swept each bright bone bare.

Flying Fortress

Flying with Americans in their B Seventeen,
Weapon-bright ship of the new world, the steady
Majestic job, I saw my England green,
Rutted, furrowed and smudged already
With history and war and the loved scene.
There below, framed in the bombardier's panel,
Was harvest stooked, or the eighteenth-century plan
Of ancestors, or pitheads, or a glint of the Channel,
Or plush-bricked manufacturing town. A man
In American kit beside me, all that crew,
Positive all, teamed-up in their B Seventeen
Out of the scalding west of America, anew
Brought, quick and keen, rare passion to the view.

JOHN LEHMANN

Talk on the River

After the supper picnic they returned,
Leaving the weedy creeks, the water voles,
And blue forget-me-nots among the reeds;
Under the arch they floated in the punt,
In flawless silence, only now and then
The paddle splashed, or gurgled as it rose,
Or a man's voice was carried from the bank
In the still air distinct; and soon they came
Into the broader river, by the weir,
While the long ridge of woods above grew dark,
And straying cloudwisps burned from rose to ash.
Alone they moved, and the incessant roar
Of unseen waters whitening dropped behind,
And dwindled to a sigh; their quiet words
Fell like a pebble in the stream itself,
Rippling calm thought with still dilating waves.

'This is an evening', he said, 'that seems
Like part of the old life before the war,
A vivid memory or dream, the war
That swallowed like a tidal wave those days. . . .
Who knows? Perhaps another war, a wave
Far out to sea, advances on the world
Bringing the final chaos.' . . . While he spoke
A launch with two red lights came sliding down,
One hung above the dark bows motionless,
One shivered in cleft waters underneath.
She watched in silence for a while, then said
'We may be standing on a rotting pier,

JOHN LEHMANN

And the next wave may smash the piles, and fall
Sweeping the wreckage with it. But the thought
Is not a living thought, it has no power;
No wars, remembered or to come, can have
Reality or menace for me now;
This evening has sealed them out of sight.'

A fish leapt suddenly beside the punt,
And the rough leaves of a low willow branch
Brushed on their hair and foreheads; round the bend
Without more words they drifted, while the moon,
Marking the hollows of alternate cheeks
With tintless shadows, in their wake appeared
Like dancing glow-worms; now the launch was gone,
The steel-blue river lapped to rest again,
A perfect mirror, where the wych-elm dived
With leaves uprising, as they neared the bridge,
And moored along the raft without a sound.

Crowds and Shadows

Threading the crowds and shadows of the street
My feet are fast in searching, but for what?
In tillage of the mind, from ancient sowing
Thought grows with images that hint the root
Dark in the earth and buried past my seeing—
Rain gathered on red apples after drought,
And sun that quivers through the cave of trees
And burns on lifted faces, and boys saying:
The clouds are off the mountains, look, the snow
Is light made solid, and the wind that tries
To crack the withered boughs from dying elms—
Sighing for these, and want from which they grew,
Nothing I find but beggars asking alms
Among the crowds and shadows of the street.

To Penetrate that Room

To penetrate that room is my desire,
The extreme attic of the mind, that lies
Just beyond the last bend in the corridor.
Writing I do it. Phrases, poems are keys.
Loving's another way (but not so sure).
A fire's in there, I think, there's truth at last
Deep in a lumber chest. Sometimes I'm near,
But draughts puff out the matches and I'm lost.
Sometimes I'm lucky, find a key to turn,
Open an inch or two—but always then
A bell rings, someone calls, or cries of 'fire'
Arrest my hand when nothing's known or seen,
And running down the stairs again I mourn.

Waking from Snow

Beyond the town's black mouth,
The swarming crossroads, the litter of houses,
Spring closes round the rails.

A thousand gardens white with fruit blossom
Wash up to the carriage window,
A wave, an explosion of life
Bursting under the unexpected sun.

And further South, where mountains assemble,
The bathers floating in their lake-canoes
Lie still, like buds just opened.

Earth, waking from snow
Where the train curls down from the pass,
Has broken the green fall of the slopes
With an upthrust of crocuses, white and purple.

All the abundance of the chestnut trees,
Their piled flowers among the mountains of leaves,
Remind, will stand as a symbol
Of the explosion of men's lives released from snow
The Spring of hand and heart and mind
That still delays.

Song of the Austrians in Dachau

(Adapted from the German of Georg Anders)

Pitiless the barbed wire dealing
Death, that round our prison runs,
And a sky that knows no feeling
Sends us ice and burning suns;
Lost to us the world of laughter,
Lost our homes, our loves, our all;
Through the dawn our thousands muster,
To their work in silence fall.

*But the slogan of Dachau is burnt on our brains
And unyielding as steel we shall be;
Are we men, brother? Then we'll be men when they've done,
Work on, we'll go through with the task we've begun,
For work, brother, work makes us free.*

JOHN LEHMANN

Haunted by the gun mouths turning
All our days and nights are spent;
Toil is ours—the way we're learning
Harder than we ever dreamt;
Weeks and months we cease to reckon
Pass, and some forget the years,
And so many men are broken
And their faces changed with fears.

But the slogan of Dachau is burnt on our brains, etc.

Heave the stone and drag the truck,
Let no load's oppression show,
In your days of youth and luck
You thought lightly: now you know.
Plunge your spade in earth and shovel
Pity where heart cannot feel,
Purged in your own sweat and trouble
Be yourself like stone and steel.

For the slogan of Dachau is burnt on our brains, etc.

One day sirens will be shrieking
One more roll-call, but the last.
And the stations we'll be seeking—
Outside, brother, prison past!
Bright the eyes of Freedom burning,
Worlds to build with joy and zest
And the work begun that morning,
Yes, that work will be our best!

For the slogan of Dachau is burnt on our brains, etc.

(NOTE.—Over the entrance to Dachau Concentration Camp
stand the words: ARBEIT MACHT FREI!)

ROY FULLER

Epitaph on a Bombing Victim

Reader, could his limbs be found
Here would lie a common man:
History inflicts no wound
But explodes what it began,
And with its enormous lust
For division splits the dust.
Do not ask his nation; that
Was history's confederate.

Defending the Harbour

We form a company to help defend
The harbour. Close against the quay a landed
Monster of a trawler huddles, grey, with sides
Flaking, and aft a grey untidy gun.
Mist shines the cobbles, dulls our waiting boots.

A climbing street links sea and town: we watch
Its pathetic burden of human purpose. All
The faces in my section are thumbled and known
As a pack of cards, and all the characters
Group and speak like a bad familiar play.

And nothing happens but the passage of time,
The monotonous wave on which we are borne and hope
Will never break. But we suspect already
The constant ache as something malignant and
Descry unspeakable deeps in the boring sand.

ROY FULLER

And on the quay, in our imagination,
The grass of starvation sprouts between the stones,
And ruins are implicit in every structure.
Gently we probe the kind and speaking faces
For the strength of heroes and for martyrs' bones.

The End of a Leave

Out of the damp black light,
The noise of locomotives,
A thousand whispering,
Sharp-nailed, sinewed, slight,
I meet that alien thing
Your hand, with all its motives.

Far from the roof of night
And iron these encounter;
In the gigantic hall
As the severing light
Menaces, human, small,
These hands exchange their counters.

Suddenly our relation
Is terrifyingly simple
Against our wretched times,
Like a hand which mimes
Love in this anguished station
Against a whole world's pull.

ROY FULLER

Spring, 1942

Once as we were sitting by
The falling sun, the thickening air,
The chaplain came against the sky
And quietly took a vacant chair.

And under the tobacco smoke:
'Freedom', he said, and 'Good' and 'Duty'.
We stared as though a savage spoke.
The scene took on a singular beauty.

And we made no reply to that
Obscure, remote communication,
But only stared at where the flat
Meadow dissolved in vegetation.

And thought: O sick, insatiable
And constant lust; O death, our future;
O revolution in the whole
Of human use of man and nature!

Troopship

Now the fish fly, the multiple skies display
Still more astounding patterns, the colours are
More brilliant than fluid paint, the grey more grey.

At dawn I saw a solitary star
Making a wake across the broken sea,
Against the heavens swayed a sable spar.

ROY FULLER

The hissing of the deep is silence, the
Only noise is our memories.

O far

From our desires, at every torrid port,
Between the gem-hung velvet of the waves,
Our sires and grandsires in their green flesh start,
Bend skinny elbows, warn: 'We have no graves.
We passed this way, with good defended ill.
Our virtue perished, evil is prince there still.'

ALUN LEWIS

All Day it has Rained

All day it has rained, and we on the edge of the moors
Have sprawled in our bell-tents, moody and dull as boors,
Groundsheets and blankets spread on the muddy ground
And from the first grey wakening we have found
No refuge from the skirmishing fine rain
And the wind that made the canvas heave and flap
And the taut wet guy-ropes ravel out and snap.
All day the rain has glided, wave and mist and dream,
Drenching the gorse and heather, a gossamer stream
Too light to stir the acorns that suddenly
Snatched from their cups by the wild south-westerly
Pattered against the tent and our upturned dreaming faces.
And we stretched out, unbuttoning our braces,
Smoking a Woodbine, darning dirty socks,
Reading the Sunday papers—I saw a fox
And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home;—
And we talked of girls, and dropping bombs on Rome,
And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities
Exhorting us to slaughter, and the herded refugees;
—Yet thought softly, morosely of them, and as indifferently
As of ourselves or those whom we
For years have loved, and will again
To-morrow maybe love; but now it is the rain
Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain.

And I can remember nothing dearer or more to my heart
Than the children I watched in the woods on Saturday
Shaking down burning chestnuts for the schoolyard's merry play,
Or the shaggy patient dog who followed me

ALUN LEWIS

By Sheet and Steep and up the wooded scree
To the Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded long
On death and beauty—till a bullet stopped his song.

Finale

He who continually struck poses
By the palm-tree in the foyer,
At the saloon bar and the banker's counter,
Crossing the dance floor after the rumba;
Who saw himself glorified in the minds of others,
Was fascinating to the young ladies,
Male, seductive, sardonic for the occasion;
Whose sloping shoulders were blazoned for duration
With the flashy epaulettes of tradition,
And yet was ever restless in ambition,
Locked in uneasy conflict with the unwinking
Inscrutable demon of self-knowledge;

To-day he struck a final gesture,
Arms akimbo against the sky,
Crucified on a cross of fire
With all the heroic age magnificent in him.
And now he lies in a pose more rigid
Than any that Life with its gambler's chance
Flung on him at a venture.

He had no choice in this, yet seems content
That Life's confused dishonesty
Should find this last simplicity.

ALUN LEWIS

Autumn, 1939

The beech boles whiten in the swollen stream;
Their red leaves, shaken from the creaking boughs,
Float down the flooded meadow, half in dream
Seen in a mirror cracked by broken vows,

Water-logged, slower, deeper, swirling down
Between the indifferent hills who also saw
Old jaunticed knights jog listlessly to town
To fight for love in some unreal war.

Black leaves are piled against the roaring weir;
Dark closes around the manor and the hut;
The dead knight moulders on his rotting bier,
And one by one the warped old casements shut.

The Mountains Over Aberdare

From this high quarried ledge I see
The place for which the Quakers once
Collected clothes, my fathers' home,
Our stubborn bankrupt village sprawled
In jaded dusk beneath its nameless hills;
The drab streets strung across the cwm,
Derelict workings, tips of slag
The gospellers and gamblers use
And children scrutting for the coal
That winter dole cannot purvey;
Allotments where the collier digs
While engines hack the coal within his brain;
Grey Hebron in a rigid cramp,
White cheap-jack cinema, the church

ALUN LEWIS

Stretched like a sow beside the stream;
And mourners in their Sunday best
Holding a tiny funeral, singing hymns
That drift insidious as the rain
Which rises from the steaming fields
And swathes about the skyline crags
Till all the upland gorse is drenched
And all the creaking mountain gates
Drip brittle tears of crystal peace;
And in a curtained parlour women hug
Huge grief, and anger against God.

But now the dusk, more charitable than Quakers,
Veils the cracked cottages with drifting may
And rubs the hard day off the slate.
The colliers squatting on the ashtip
Listen to one who holds them still with tales,
While that white frock that floats down the dark alley
Looks just like Christ; and in the lane
The clink of coins among the gamblers
Suggests the thirty pieces of silver.

I watch the clouded years
Rune the rough foreheads of these moody hills,
This wet evening, in a lost age.

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